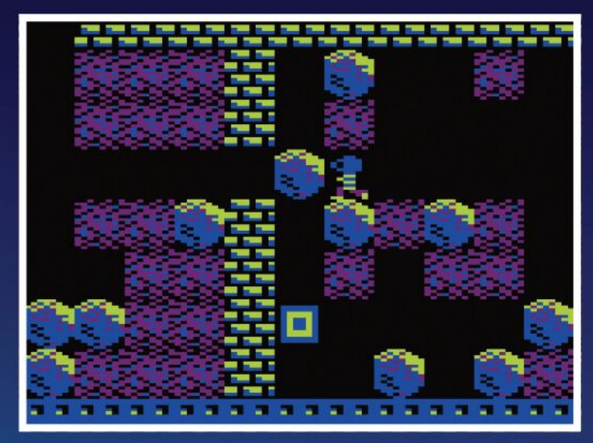
OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

# retro GAMER



## THE EVOLUTION OF BOULDER DASH

HOW PETER LIEPA TRANSFORMED HIS SUBTERRANEAN PUZZLE GAME

## THE MAKING OF MICROPROSE SOCCER

JON HARE REVEALS HOW SENSIBLE CREATED ITS HIT SOCCER GAME

## SIR CLIVE SINCLAIR

REVISITING AN ICON'S TRIUMPHS

# EVERCADE

## RETRO RECONSTRUCTED: HANDS-ON WITH BLAZE'S POWERED-UP CONSOLE

FUTURE

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LEARN ABOUT THE STRIKE GAME THAT BECAME A MECH MONSTER

### MINORITY REPORT: BBC MASTER

HIDDEN CLASSICS TO DISCOVER FOR THE 8-BIT COMPUTER

### DMA DESIGN: THE N64 YEARS

THE INNOVATIVE GAMES THAT PAVED THE WAY FOR GTA III

### FIRST SAMURAI

INSIDE THE CLASSIC 16-BIT PLATFORMER

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# LOADING...

**The original Evercade launched in early 2020 and proved a nice distraction in a very difficult year.** It certainly wasn't perfect, due to oversights like the lack of a 1:1 display, missing multiplayer capabilities and the sometimes strange selection of available games, but it's hard to argue with the handheld's solid build, excellent d-pad and extremely cheap selection of curated cartridges. In short we really like it.

We're delighted then to not only deliver an early hands-on look at the incoming Evercade VS, but also an in-depth feature that looks at the creation of the new machine and how it plans to solve many of the minor niggles that let the original handheld down. We've even been able to look at some of the new arcade-based cartridges that will be out at the same time of the Evercade VS' launch. It may be a modern system, but like the handheld, it feels delightfully retro at the same time.

Other highlights of issue 226 include a look at *Microprose Soccer* with Jon Hare, the evolution of Peter Liepa's fantastic *Boulder Dash* and a selection of entertaining games to enjoy on the expanded BBC Master. We also learn how DMA Design's *Space Station Silicon Valley* and *Body Harvest* led to *Grand Theft Auto III*, what Makoto Shibata and Keisuke Kikuchi have planned for the remaster of *Project Zero: Maiden Of Black Water* and reveal if *Metroid Dread* is a worthy successor to *Metroid Fusion*.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

retro GAMER
EVERCADE
RETRO RECONSTRUCTED: HANDS-ON WITH BLAZE'S POWERED-UP CONSOLE
THE MAKING OF FUTURE COP: LAPD
MINORITY REPORT: BBC MASTER
DMA DESIGN: THE N64 YEARS
FIRST SAMURAI
PLUS SUPER MARIO BROS 3 STEVE GOLSON GUACANELEE 2 NU WAVE SOFTWARE MAUI MALLARD 2 ROBOTRON: 2084

## THE RETROBATES

WHAT PUBLISHER WOULD YOU LOVE TO SEE ON EVERCADE?

### DARRAN JONES

Nintendo is never likely to happen, but I'm confident a PC Engine or Konami collection is perfectly possible going forward.
**Expertise:** Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof
**Currently playing**: *Shantae*
**Favourite game of all time:** *Strider*

### TIM EMPEY

I don't want to sound like a shill as I did work for Capcom for a bit (I was paid in Bison Dollars), but yeah, get some Capcom classics on there.
**Expertise:** Finishing Game Pass games before they leave the service
**Currently playing:** *Wasteland 3*
**Favourite game of all time:** *God Hand*

### NICK THORPE

Just imagine a Taito arcade cartridge. *Bubble Bobble*, *Rastan*, *The New Zealand Story*, *Elevator Action Returns*, *Space Invaders '95*… excuse me, I need a lie down.
**Expertise:** Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
**Currently playing:** *Super Monkey Ball Banana Mania*
**Favourite game of all time:** *Sonic The Hedgehog*

### ANDY SALTER

Electronic Arts, who published Naughty Dog's *Rings Of Power* on the Sega Mega Drive. EA also published *Desert Strike*, *Road Rash*, *Populous* and many more classic 16-bit games.
**Expertise:** Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
**Currently playing:** *M&B2: Bannerlord*… Modded of course
**Favourite game of all time:** *Rome: Total War*

### PAUL ROSE

Evercade: Ultimate Play The Game. Hands down!
**Expertise:** Winging it
**Currently playing:** *Far Cry 6*
**Favourite game of all time:** *Half-Life 2*

### PAUL DRURY

A complete Llamasoft collection – the 8-bit and 16-bit classics and the Minotaur Project games would work wonderfully, plus it could be a home for rarely seen stuff like *Tempest 3000*. Please make this happen.
**Expertise:** *Crazy Otto*
**Currently playing:** *Puzzle Bobble*
**Favourite game of all time:** *Sheep In Space*

### DAVID CROOKES

Ocean Software, if only because the logo alone evokes so much nostalgia in me.
**Expertise:** Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, *Dizzy* and PlayStation 2 (but is it actually retro? Debate!)
**Currently playing:** *Toki*
**Favourite game of all time:** *Broken Sword*

### ANDREW FISHER

A Hewson collection across 8-bit and 16-bit, with the likes of *Paradroid* and *Cybernoid*.
**Experience:** Over 35 years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Wii U.
**Currently playing:** *Ewe Woz 'Ere DX*
**Favourite game of all time:** *Paradroid*

### RORY MILNE

The slick visuals and compulsive gameplay that Irem seemed to have on tap during the Eighties make it the obvious choice for me. I reckon *R-Type* alone would justify an Evercade cart.
**Expertise:** The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
**Currently playing:** *International Karate*
**Favourite game of all time:** *Tempest*

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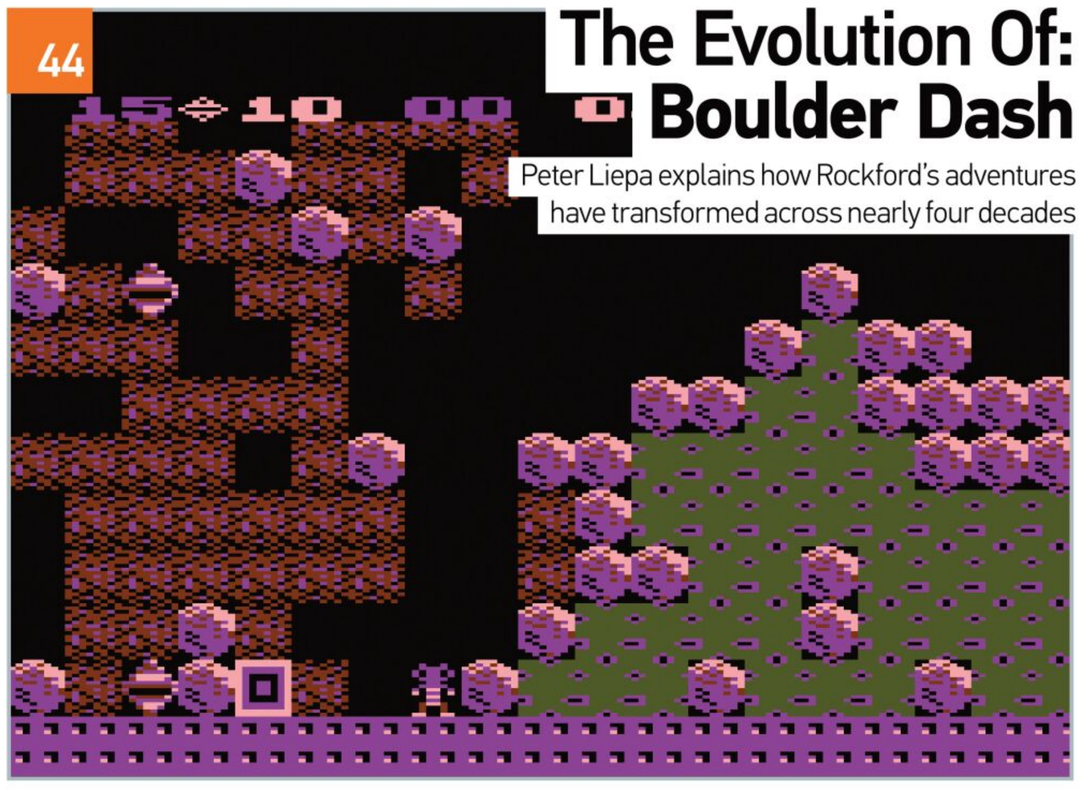



**The Evolution Of: Boulder Dash**
Peter Liepa explains how Rockford's adventures have transformed across nearly four decades

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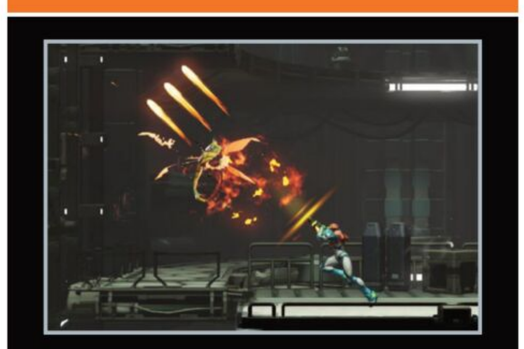

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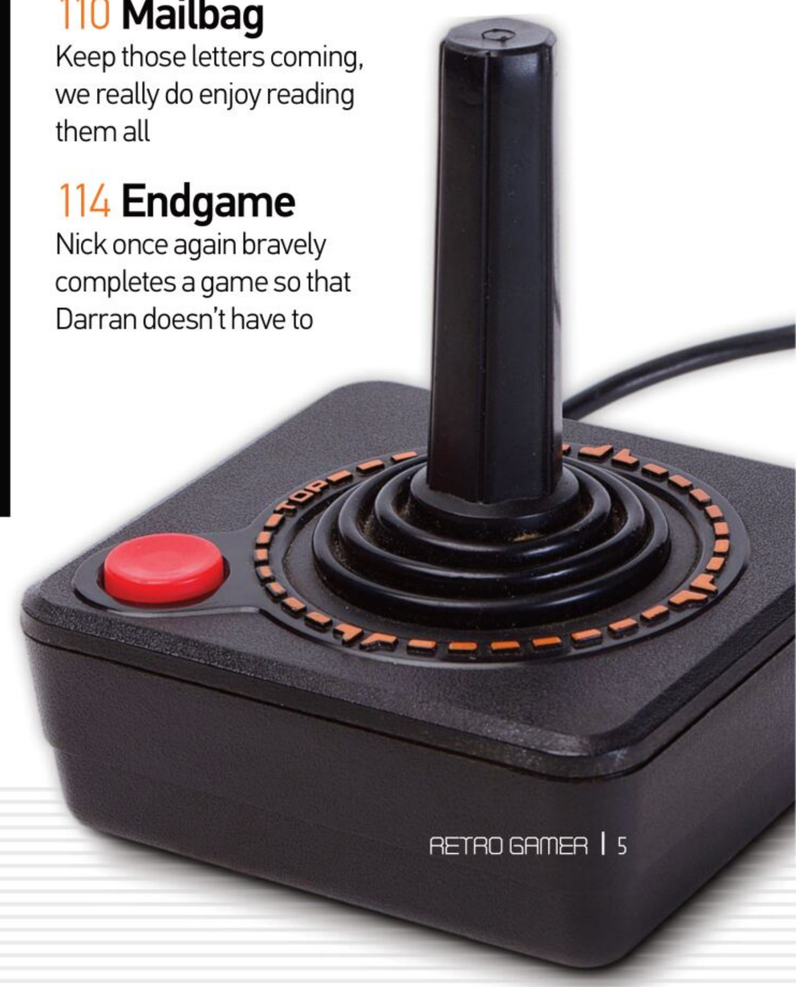

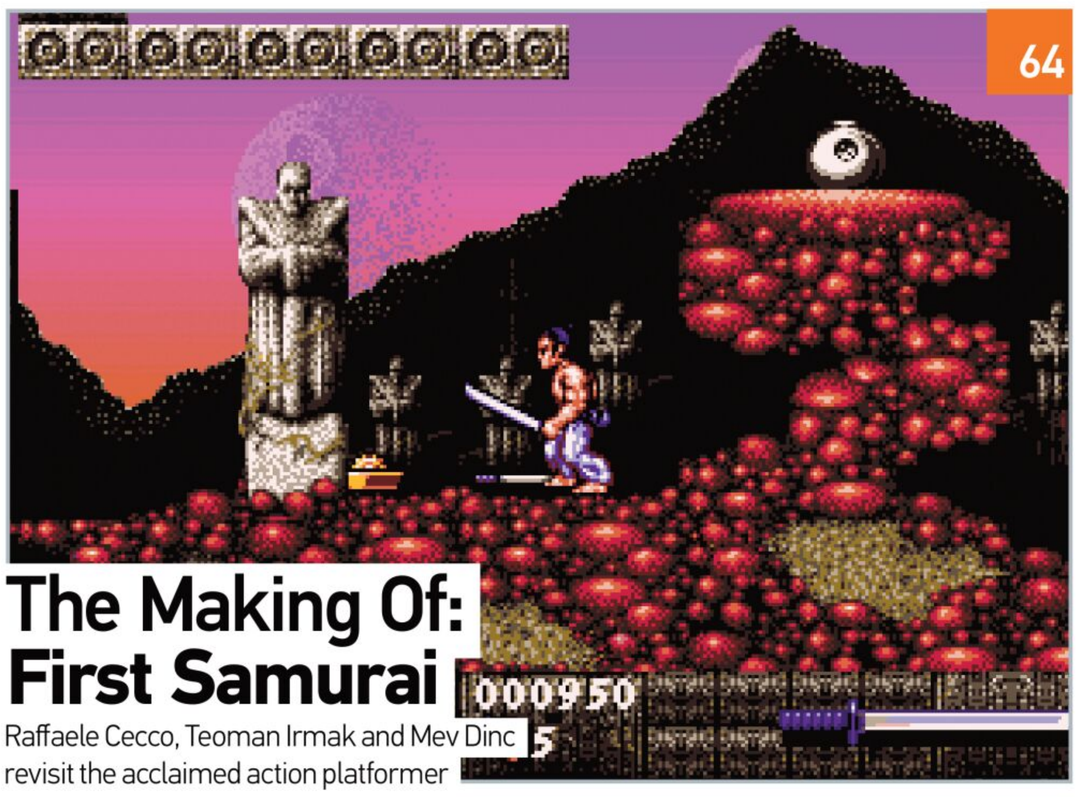


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## The Making Of: First Samurai

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# retroradar

GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD

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This excellent Sir Clive portrait by Craig Stevenson (@hot_piping) first appeared in *Edge* 205.

# IN MEMORY OF SIR CLIVE SINCLAIR

**Tributes have been paid to the eccentric entrepreneur who brought home computing to the masses following his sad passing, aged 81**

Words by David Crookes

**Sir Clive Sinclair barely needs an introduction.** Not in a magazine such as this nor, dare we say, even in the wider world. Many people could talk about at least one of the many products the eccentric entrepreneur oversaw. "He was the classic British inventor," says Graeme Devine who is best known for developing the interactive CD-ROM bestseller *The 7th Guest*. "He saw a need and invented it whether it was time to invent it or not."

Sir Clive sadly passed away on 16 September this year but his legacy lives deep in many a memory. To one of his three children, Belinda Sinclair, he was "a rather amazing person" who was "so clever" and "always interested in everything". To the chief executive of Microsoft, Satya Nadella, his ZX80 was the device that sparked a passion for engineering. "Your innovations democratised computing and inspired so many, including myself," he wrote on Twitter.

But it would seem Sir Clive was destined to make an impact. Born on 30 July 1940 to mechanical engineer George Sinclair and Thora Marles, he was an intelligent, gifted and driven child, excelling in pure and applied maths as well as physics. He also made good use of his time at home, looking forward to the holidays so he could pursue his own ideas.

According to Rodney Dale, author of *The Sinclair Story* (1985), Sir Clive's bedroom was a mess. There were wires everywhere because he was spending so much time creating amplifiers and radios. He went as far as producing an electrical communication system for his friends to use in their hideouts in the woods.

By the time he was taking holiday jobs at tech companies such as Solatron and pitching ideas for electronic vehicles, he'd also designed a calculating machine programmed by punch cards and a submarine based on a surplus fuel tank! He would also write for *Practical Wireless* magazine and, after a holiday job, became its editorial assistant aged just 17.

The following year, he was editing the publication, more than justifying his decision not to go to university. But while he could have forged a career as a talented tech journalist, he had a burning desire to set up his own business and his journey led him to setting up Sinclair Radionics when he was 22 years old.

The company sold miniature electronic kits through the post to hobbyists, starting with the Sinclair Micro-amplifier, billed as "the smallest of its type in the world". It laid down a marker for Sir Clive's approach to electronics: to go as small as possible. It also shows how he valued marketing, placing large ads in leading publications. "His name and logo became a must-have for most of the electronics hobbyists," says Christopher Curry who worked for Sir Clive for 13 years from 1966.

Throughout the Sixties and Seventies, Sir Clive's company was prolific. It produced hi-fi systems, digital watches, the matchbox-size wrist-wearable radio Micro-6 and the world's first portable TV, Microvision. It also created the world's smallest radio, Micromatic, in 1967, and the world's first slimline pocket calculator, the Sinclair Executive in 1972.

"I learnt to code on the Sinclair programmable calculator, working out over and over how the moon lander worked," says Graeme. "That was definitely the coolest program in the programming book that came

## FROM THE MIND OF SIR CLIVE

**Five notable Sinclair creations**

### SINCLAIR EXECUTIVE

The world's first pocket calculator was released by Sinclair Radionics in 1972 and adverts suggested it was the same thickness as a cigarette pack. ("One must always bear a packet of cigarettes in mind as the ideal size," a Sinclair executive told the *Financial Times*, perhaps also nodding to Sir Clive Sinclair's 40-a-day-habit.)

### MICROVISION MTV-1

In 1977, two years after the Black Watch almost bankrupted the company, Sinclair showed off a tiny two-inch CRT television that had been ten years in the making. Outputting in black and white, it operated on the UHF and VHF bands, allowing it to be used across the world. Initially popular, interest soon waned.

### ZX SPECTRUM

Having launched the affordable home computers, the ZX80 and ZX81, Sinclair further improved with the ZX Spectrum, a now iconic machine which revolutionised computing, particularly in the UK. Priced for the mass market, it became best known for its vast range of games and inspired an entire generation of developers.

### SINCLAIR C5

Manufactured in Merthyr Tydfil, Wales, the Sinclair C5 was, with hindsight, hugely ahead of its time. Although this one-person pedal-electric tricycle was roundly laughed at when it was launched (in cold January, of all months), its top speed of 15 miles-per-hour and claimed 20-mile range wasn't to be sniffed at, even if it did look a tad dangerous.

### SINCLAIR QL

Sir Clive Sinclair didn't really like the fact his computers were being seen as games machines so he hoped a new machine based around a Motorola 68008 7.5MHz processor, 128KB and a couple of microdrives would appeal to business-minded folk. Sadly, the QL – standing for Quantum Leap – was beset with technical problems.

with the calculator and it was an inexpensive way for a family to get something for their child to learn programming on. I savoured it."

Even so, there were even cooler products on the way; computers that would revolutionise Britain's technology industry. They followed after a particularly troublesome period for Sir Clive, one in which Sinclair Radionics had been bailed out and effectively taken over by the National Enterprise Board.

As a consequence, Sir Clive created a new company called Sinclair Instrument which became Science Of Cambridge in 1977 and sold a computer kit called MK14 for £39.95. Two years later, Sinclair's chief engineer Jim Westwood worked on another computer, the ZX80. "Sir Clive gave the world the first computers that people could afford," Graeme continues.

The ZX80 was a triumph. Costing £79.95 in kit form and £99.95 fully assembled (at a time when the Commodore PET was costing £700), it was advertised as Britain's first complete computer kit. Buyers needed to purchase a mains adapter and there were memory expansion boards available but the machine boasted 1K of RAM out of the box, with the Z80 processor running at a speed of 3.25MHz.

*Personal Computer World* magazine gave it five stars for looks and value for money, praising its ability to make BASIC easy to learn and being "small enough for it not to be intimidating". It questioned Science Of Cambridge's claim to offer high resolution graphics but then Sir Clive did have a penchant for hyperbole.

News

**Sir Clive hits out in pub punch-up**

THE RIVALRY between Sir Clive Sinclair and former employee Chris Curry, now head of Acorn Computers, developed into open warfare over the Christmas period.

Having commissioned a survey on the reliability of micros which appeared to demonstrate the superiority of the BBC over the Spectrum, advertisements were placed in two national newspapers on behalf of Acorn, implying that Spectrums bought as Christmas presents would soon be taken back to the shops, and their owners would do better to buy BBC computers instead.

The advertisement so angered Sir Clive that he attacked Curry in the *Baron of Beef*, a Cambridge pub where both are regular customers. Sir Clive walked up to Curry and slapped him about the head, then argued with him about the advertisement. There was some shoving and jostling, and the two men later began fighting again in *Shades*, an upmarket Cambridge wine bar.

Such strong passions amazed the national press, which appear to have believed that the world of technology is populated by cold fish with few emotions. Sir Clive even fell victim to the notorious columnist Jean Rook, who said in the *Daily Express* that she thought the fight gave him sex appeal.

The two leaders of British home computing are now said to have made up their differences, and Chris Curry was a welcome guest at Sir Clive's New Year's Eve party.

Sir Clive's brother Iain Sinclair comments, "It's nice to know our captains of industry are just as capable of letting their hair down and making complete idiots of themselves as the rest of us."

**Bugs attempt to sabotage free booklet**

DUE to some unfortunate type-setting errors in last month's free booklet four of the programs contained errors in syntax.

*Tip 18.* Line 9915 contained an extra opening bracket at the beginning of the line. It should start IF (PEEK(

*Tip 31.* Line 100 should read: IF A(X,Y) = B THEN LET B=A(X): LET D=K. Line 135 should be inserted: NEXT M

*Tip 36.* At lines 30 and 40 LENS should read LEN.

*Tip 47.* The two extra opening brackets at the start of line 270 should be deleted.

We apologise to readers for these errors and hope that they are finding the booklet useful.

**Spectrum + upgrade**

SINCLAIR has just launched the official Spectrum Plus upgrade kit — so if you are feeling hard done by, having just bought a Spectrum 48K, cheer up because you can upgrade it for a mere £20.00.

The kit provides you with the new keyboard — complete with 58 hard, moulded keys including a space bar — an 80-page user guide and companion cassette which provides you with three arcade games and an 'interactive tour of the new keyboard'. You will, however, lose out on the free pack of software which comes with a new Spectrum Plus.

According to Sinclair, you need no knowledge of electronics to tackle the upgrade, only a soldering iron and a steady hand.

If you do not feel up to the job, Sinclair will do it for you for £30.00 and return your computer within a record-breaking 10 days.

The Spectrum Plus upgrade will accept all peripherals in your Sinclair system. All future Spectrum peripherals are being designed with the Plus in mind.

**Runner drops out of the race**

FRONT RUNNER, the K-Tel software subsidiary, appears to be tightening its belt in 1985.

K-Tel entered the software market in 1983 and its first batch of releases included **It's Only Rock 'n' Roll**, which proved a minor success. The company name, Front Runner, was launched less than a year ago and its recent releases include **Boulder Dash** and **Space Professor**.

However, the recession seems to be hitting even major record companies like K-Tel and a decision was taken recently to withdraw Front Runner from the LET show — a trade show at which almost every software house will be present.

According to a company spokesman, Front Runner is, at present, taking a close look at the market. Asked if that meant that Front Runner would be pulling out of the market altogether, the spokesman replied, "Not necessarily so", but did not specifically deny the suggestion.

**The force is going soft**

RETURN of the Jedi and **Deathstar Battle** form two major software releases from Sinclair Research.

The games, both for the Spectrum Plus, follow the adventures of Luke Skywalker and bear more than a slight resemblance to the events portrayed in the George Lucas **Star Wars** film trilogy.

The two packages will be part of the Spectrum Plus six pack, available free with the machine, replacing two other titles.

**The fate of a stuntman**

ELITE has suffered a small setback with its latest game — **Fall Guy**. A few days after its launch Fall Guy stumbled, damaging the game's turbo load facility in the process.

Five thousand copies of the game were initially released with the turbo load facility which refused to load the game at all. Fall Guy has since been recalled.

Steve Wilcox from Elite comments, "We immediately remastered the tape to produce the game without the turbo load. Anyone experiencing loading problems should return them to us for a replacement."

The fault can be rectified by adjusting the alignment of the cassette heads.

more news on page 10

SINCLAIR USER March 1985 9

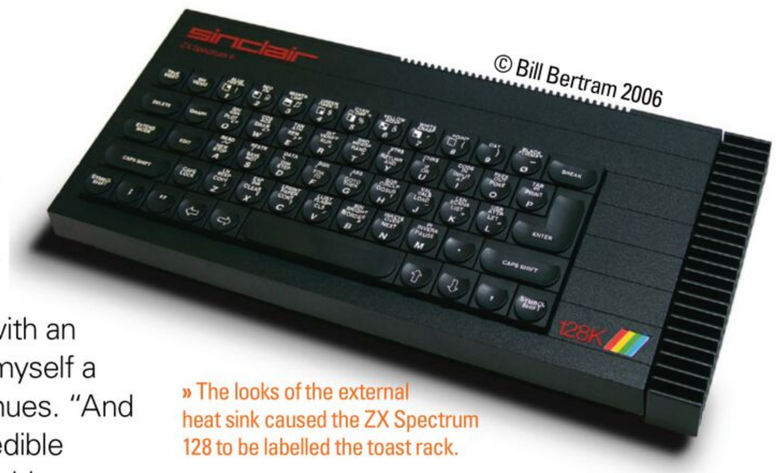
» It's the infamous pub punch-up, as covered in Sinclair User in March 1985.

**The ZX80 helped many people forge long-lasting careers thanks, in part, to the inclusion of the BASIC programming language.** Revolution Software boss Charles Cecil recalls his one-time colleague at Ford, Richard Turner, who decided against having a lavish 18th birthday party in favour of getting a ZX80 instead. "He disassembled the ROM, sold it as a booklet via mail order and created Artic Computing," Charles says.

In 1981, Sir Clive followed the ZX80 with the ZX81, cheaper at £49.95 in kit form and £69.95 fully built. Still outputting in black and white, it reduced the chip count from 21 to four and it came with an extra 4K of ROM. "I bought myself a ZX81 in 1981," Charles continues. "And I was spellbound by this incredible technology. It was of comparable power to the multi-million dollar computers that controlled Apollo 11 just a decade earlier and I started playing and writing simple games."

Sir Clive believed he was on to a winner, too, so much so that he felt this computer was perfectly placed to become the official machine of the BBC Computer Literacy Project. That honour fell to Acorn – set up by Christopher – which subsequently released the BBC Micro and saw it installed in schools up and down the UK. Yet the ZX81 arguably made more of an impact and Sinclair User was reporting 400,000 sales in May 1982 saying no other personal computer had come close.

"The first computer I owned was the Sinclair ZX81," says David Perry, industry legend and creator of blockbuster games such as *Earthworm Jim*. "To say Sir Clive had a major impact on my life and career is an understatement. I did get to meet him briefly but I would have killed to have worked with him on something. Most of my games were published on his computers!"




» The looks of the external heat sink caused the ZX Spectrum 128 to be labelled the toast rack.

Sir Clive remained angry about the BBC's decision to go with Acorn for some time but it appeared to drive him more than ever. "He was notoriously secretive about new product ideas," Christopher says. There was a sense he wanted to prove a point and his rivalry with Acorn became fierce.

He told an interviewer for *Your Computer* magazine in June 1982 that he once considered calling the Sinclair ZX Spectrum 'Not the BBC Micro' but he also knew that he was on to a winner with his own computer – he says it was more elegantly designed and provided more power than the BBC Micro Model A. "He was proud of the ZX Spectrum but he did not brag – except when in advertising or marketing mode," Christopher says.

The ZX Spectrum was available with either 16K or 48K of memory. It again had a Z80 processor but boasted eight colours and outputted sound through the computer itself. "It was the first colour computer that really kickstarted the game industry in the UK into super high gear," says Graeme.

## DEVELOPER LEGACIES
### Five companies influenced by Sir Clive Sinclair

### AMSTRAD
Amstrad bought the rights to Sinclair's inventions in 1986 and re-engineered the ZX Spectrum 128 into the tape-based ZX Spectrum +2 and 3-inch disk ZX Spectrum +3. But Amstrad's former group technology consultant Roland Perry tells us, "Building something better than the Spectrum was an important influence on the CPC range. We also depended on software houses porting games from the Spectrum to our platform."

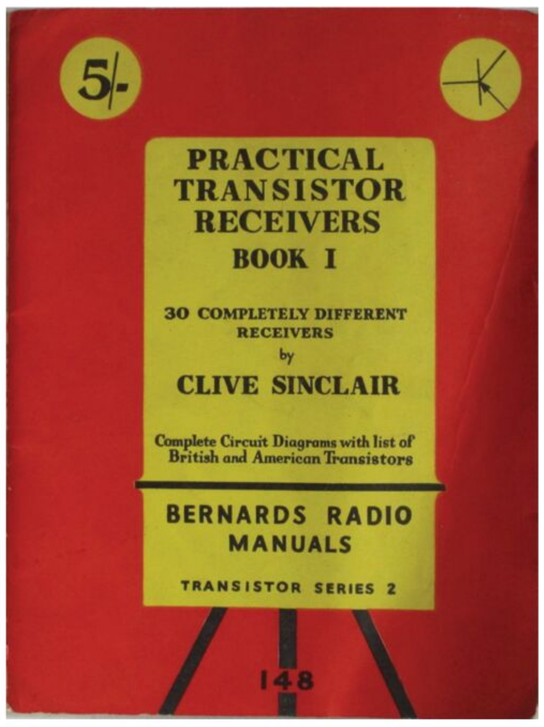
### ULTIMATE PLAY THE GAME
Founded in 1982 by Tim and Chris Stamper, Ultimate Play The Game (now Rare) made its debut with the iconic shooter *Jetpac* in May 1983 for the 16K ZX Spectrum, selling 300,000 copies. The developer became a firm favourite among Spectrum gamers releasing *Lunar Jetman*, *Atic Atac*, the *Sabreman* series and the isometric-viewed *Knight Lore* among many others. Four titles were released on a ROM cartridge for the ZX Interface 2.

### ROCKSTAR NORTH
David Jones, Russell Kay, Steve Hammond and Mike Dailly used to meet at the Kingsway Amateur Computer Club in Dundee. David and Russell ended up writing *Zone Trooper* for the ZX Spectrum and this inspired the four to form DMA Design, the company that created *Lemmings* and the *Grand Theft Auto* series. Of course, today we know the company as Rockstar North – one of the most successful videogame developers in the world!

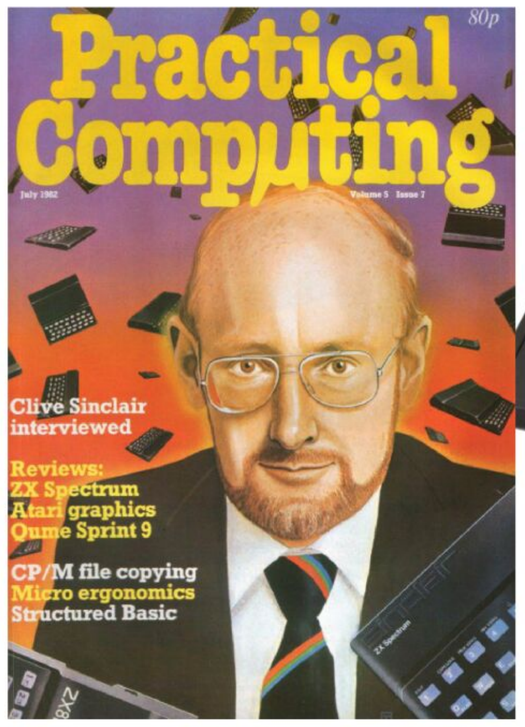
### BOSSA STUDIOS
Bossa Studios' cofounder, Henrique Olifiers, created his first game on the ZX Spectrum. "I would not have been able to afford a computer if it was not for Sinclair," he says. "It taught me how to code." He also spearheaded the development of the advanced and updated ZX Spectrum Next initially released in 2017. "The stories I've read about his ambitions, way of working, challenges and achievements is of such rich texture that I took to preserving it above all else," he adds.

Why the Sinclair ZX80 is Britain's best selling
Built: £99.95
Including VAT, post and packing, free course in computing, free mains adaptor.
Kit: £79.95
Including VAT, post and packing, free course in computing.
This is the ZX80. A really powerful, full-facility computer, matching or surpassing other personal computers at several times the price. 'Personal Computer World' gave it 5 stars for 'excellent value'. Benchmark tests say it's faster than all previous personal computers.
Programmed in BASIC – the world's most popular language – the ZX80 is suitable for beginners and experts alike. And response from enthusiasts has been tremendous – over 20,000 ZX80s have been sold so far!
Powerful ROM and BASIC interpreter
The 4K BASIC ROM offers remarkable programming advantages:
Unique 'one-touch' key word entry: the ZX80 eliminates a great deal of tiresome typing. Key words (RUN, PRINT, LIST, etc.) have their own single-key entry.
Unique syntax check. A cursor identifies errors immediately.
Excellent string-handling capability – takes up to 26 string variables of any length. All strings can undergo all relational tests (e.g. comparison).
Up to 26 single dimension arrays.
FOR/NEXT loops nested up to 26.
Variable names of any length.
BASIC language also handles full Boolean arithmetic, conditional expressions, etc.
Randomise function, useful for games and secret codes, as well as more serious applications.
Timer under program control.
PEEK and POKE enable entry of machine code instructions.
High-resolution graphics.
Lines of unlimited length.
Unique RAM
The ZX80's 1K-BYTE RAM is the equivalent of up to 4K BYTES in a conventional computer – typically storing 100 lines of BASIC.
No other personal computer offers this unique combination of high capability and low price.
The Sinclair teach-yourself BASIC manual
If the specifications of the Sinclair ZX80 mean little to you – don't worry. They're all explained in the specially-written 128-page book (free with every ZX80). The book makes learning easy, exciting and enjoyable, and represents a complete course in BASIC programming – from first principles to complex programs.
Kit or built – it's up to you
In kit form, the ZX80 is pleasantly easy to assemble, using a fine-tipped soldering iron. And you may already have a suitable mains adaptor – 600 mA at 9V DC nominal unregulated. If not, see the coupon.
Both kit and built versions come complete with all necessary leads to connect to your TV (colour or black and white) and cassette recorder. Plug in and you're ready to go. (Built versions come with mains adaptor.)
The ZX80 as a family learning aid. Children of 10 years and upwards are quick to understand the principles of computing – and enjoy their personal computer.

» Sir Clive always took out large adverts, knowing that they were important in selling his products.




» Sir Clive Sinclair wrote this splendid looking tome, among others, published in 1959.




» Sir Clive splashed across the front of the *Practical Computing* magazine in July 1982.

© Evan Amos

» The ZX81 was launched 40 years ago and was manufactured at the Timex factory in Dundee.

Yet Sir Clive didn't have much time for the videogame industry. "I was always surprised he didn't reach out to meet games developers at that time but I suspect, without evidence, that he thought his computers should be used for more important pursuits," says Charles Cecil, boss of Revolution Software.

Charles is certainly correct. Mel Croucher, founder of Automata UK, took to Facebook and recalled how, at one of the entrepreneur's famed Cambridge parties, Sir Clive told him "the purpose of home micro computers was to conduct personal accounts, solve mathematical problems and make inventories". Mel said people would play games on them. "He looked at me as if I was bonkers."

But play games they did: Wikipedia notes an incomplete list of 1,731 games for the Speccy and we all have our favourites. "He was very much our hero," says Philip Oliver, one half of the prolific programming duo, the Oliver twins, with brother Andrew. "We always perceived him as a struggling underdog who we wanted to support."

Not that Sir Clive needed people to fight his corner. Knighted in 1983 on the recommendation of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, he was capable of doing that himself. Indeed, in December 1984, he came to blows with Christopher over an Acorn advert suggesting people would swap their Spectrums for a superior BBC Micro. He swiped Christopher around the head with a rolled-up newspaper in the Baron Of Beef pub in Cambridge and the spat continued in Shades Wine Bar.

This little incident was re-played in the BBC4 drama *Micro Men* in 2010 – a programme that Sir Clive said had "no bearing on the truth". It didn't affect his friendship with Christopher either. "I do not recall missing any of his New Year's Eve parties, which were great," the former Acorn man says. "When he moved to London they became more celebrity laden. Alcohol ruled and we all behaved disgracefully."

**Sadly, the good times didn't last.** The Sinclair QL computer, aimed at the business market, flopped largely due to it using microdrives as the native storage medium and the drives proving unreliable. "I talked to several suppliers, especially those developing the QL, and got a sense Sinclair was designing down to a price where it would never actually work," says Roland Perry, Amstrad's former group technology consultant. "Sadly when the Sinclair QL failed to take off, largely due to several design flaws, his trouble started," affirms Philip. "But the final blow came when he relentlessly pursued his dream of an electric vehicle for the masses. The ambition was great but the C5 was a disaster. Sir Clive was a dreamer, predicting the future, but he was sadly under-financed."

The financial strain didn't help his marriage and, in 1985, he divorced his first wife, Ann, with whom he had three children, Crispin, Bartholomew and Belinda (he'd marry again, in 2010, to former beauty queen and Stringfellows' nightclub dancer Angie Bowness, divorcing seven years later).

The following year, he sold the marketing and merchandising rights to Sinclair Research's inventions to Amstrad for £5 million. He then largely concentrated on personal transport, launching products such as the Zike electronic bicycle in 1992 and a motorised device called Zeta in 1994. They didn't take off, leaving the Spectrum as his peak achievement, but that doesn't diminish the lasting achievements of "the eternal optimist" – someone who chaired British Mensa between 1980 and 1997 and had an IQ of 159!

"Cambridge is the beating heart of the electronics industry today and so much can be traced back to the genius of Sir Clive Sinclair who passionately pursued his dream of cheap electronics and computers for the masses," says Philip. That is no surprise, says Henrique Olifiers. "We're talking about someone who invented the pocket calculator; who made computers affordable to a generation; who saw so far into the future that he bet everything on an electric vehicle that was way ahead of its time," he says. "That's the lasting impression Sir Clive left for me, one that goes way beyond what he was like as a human being." ✱

## WILD GUNS RETURNS

Strictly Limited Games has recently unveiled a physical release of *Wild Guns: Reloaded*. These physical versions are limited to 2,000 copies on Switch and 1,000 on PlayStation 4 so expect them to sell out rather quickly. Alternatively PAL and NTSC reissues of the original SNES cartridge will also be made available, but again are in limited quantities, so make sure you don't miss out.

## MEGA SWITCH 64

In addition to revealing a brand-new *Kirby* game, Nintendo recently announced that N64 and Mega Drive games are heading to Switch. Both systems are part of Nintendo's online service and join the NES and SNES games that are already available. Plenty of classics are included, from *Mario Tennis* and *Sin & Punishment* to *Shinobi III* and *Castlevania: Bloodlines* and it has now been confirmed that the N64 games support NTSC.

## SHINY ENTERTAINMENT

Lots of individual game developers were influenced by the ZX Spectrum from the Oliver twins, Matthew Smith and Mike Singleton to Ste Pickford, Julian Gollop and Jon Ritman. David Perry began his career converting games to the ZX Spectrum and contributing type-ins to magazines and books. He went on to develop *Earthworm Jim* and *Disney's Aladdin* and he founded cloud game streaming company Gaikai which he sold to Sony.

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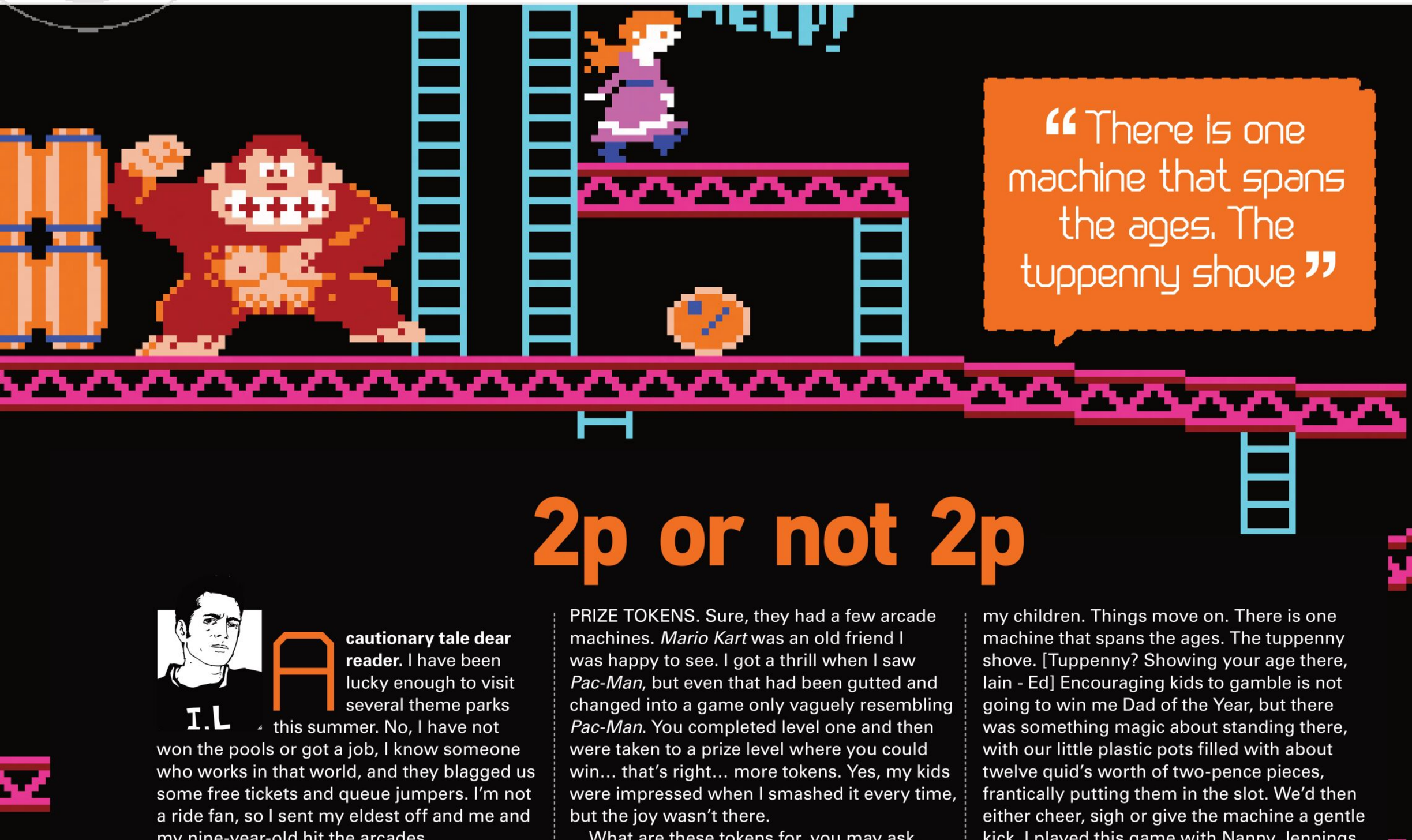
**Who is Iain Lee?**
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. Join him as he hosts a phone-in show and plays games at www.twitch.tv/iainlee and also check out www.patreon.com/iainandKatherine




# 2p or not 2p



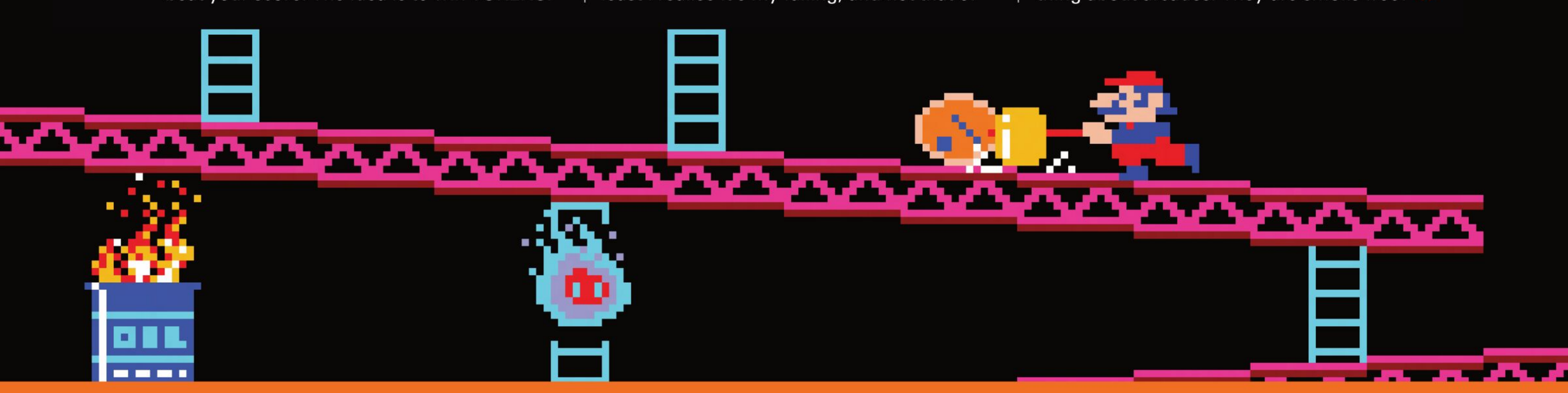

**A cautionary tale dear reader.** I have been lucky enough to visit several theme parks this summer. No, I have not won the pools or got a job, I know someone who works in that world, and they blagged us some free tickets and queue jumpers. I'm not a ride fan, so I sent my eldest off and me and my nine-year-old hit the arcades.

And here's where that warning comes in. Arcades are now not arcades. They are completely different beasts. The aim is no longer to go from machine to machine, waggling the joystick and bugging your dad for 10p. No. Now the aim is to throw basketballs into tiny hoops, throw other balls into tiny milk churns and throw smaller balls at like these weird sort of clown things and then they pop back up again and… oh god, it was hell. No, the idea is not to have fun and to beat your score. The idea is to win TOKENS. PRIZE TOKENS. Sure, they had a few arcade machines. *Mario Kart* was an old friend I was happy to see. I got a thrill when I saw *Pac-Man*, but even that had been gutted and changed into a game only vaguely resembling *Pac-Man*. You completed level one and then were taken to a prize level where you could win… that's right… more tokens. Yes, my kids were impressed when I smashed it every time, but the joy wasn't there.

What are these tokens for, you may ask. Well, they are there so that if you win 800 (at a cost of roughly £60) you could claim two Refresher bars, a Drumstick and a tub of fart putty. This would have set you back about £1.25 in Lidl, but my children were unable to understand that.

I'm old. And just as my dad didn't understand the allure of *Donkey Kong* and *Dragon's Lair*, I fail to see the pleasure in collecting these tokens simply to take them to a bored teenager to claim cheap tat. But at least I realise it's my failing, and not that of my children. Things move on. There is one machine that spans the ages. The tuppenny shove. [Tuppenny? Showing your age there, Iain - Ed] Encouraging kids to gamble is not going to win me Dad of the Year, but there was something magic about standing there, with our little plastic pots filled with about twelve quid's worth of two-pence pieces, frantically putting them in the slot. We'd then either cheer, sigh or give the machine a gentle kick. I played this game with Nanny Jennings when I was probably younger than my boys. She'd be 100 now and would be absolutely thrilled to see her great grandchildren carrying on this fine tradition of shovelling money into a machine with the sole purpose of putting any winnings straight back in.

No one walks away from the tuppenny shove richer. Well, not financially richer. But my spirit was refreshed. And so were my lungs. When I played with my nan, she'd always have a fag on the go. That's one good thing about arcades. They are smoke free! *




**Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:**

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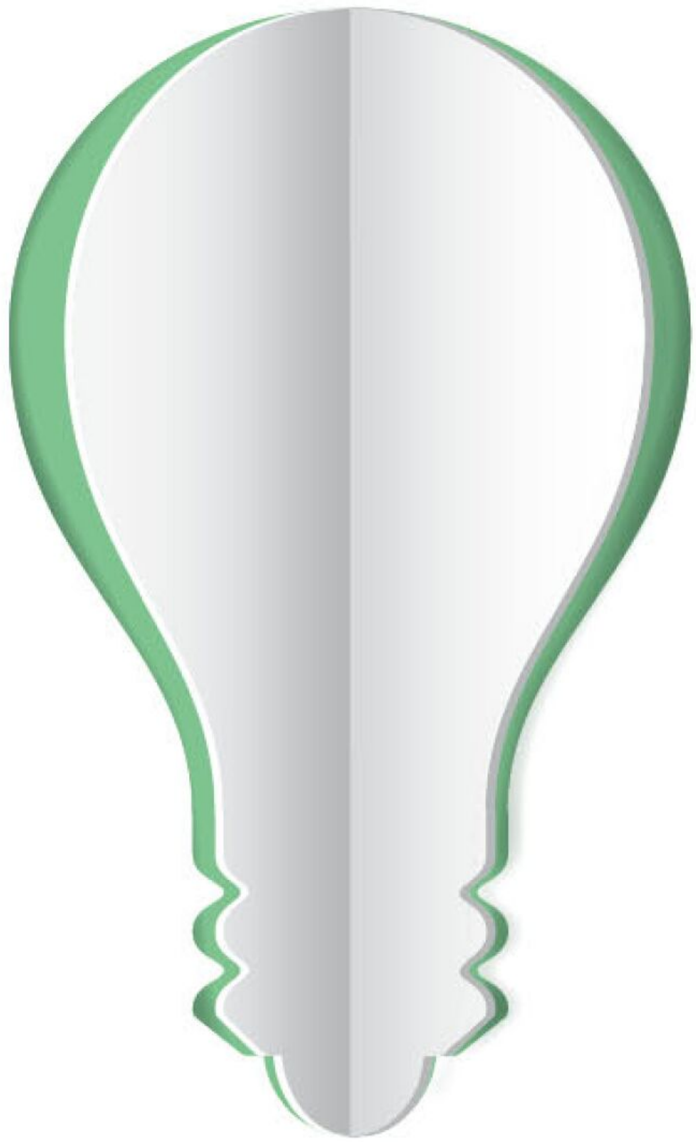

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LOVE PAPER

**Who is Paul Rose?**
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

# Monkey see, monkey do

**This may come as a surprise to many of you… but until very recently, I'd never played *The Secret Of Monkey Island*.** I know that it's one of those games that everyone of a certain age is meant to have experienced, but I'd filed it alongside *Dark Souls*, *Baldur's Gate*, any *Final Fantasy* game after *VII*, *The Godfather*, *Game of Thrones* and *Breaking Bad*.

That's not to say I had zero knowledge of *Monkey Island*. I knew the basic plot. I knew of Le Chuck and Guybrush Threepwood. I even knew about the three trials and the insult fights. I guess it was so ubiquitous that I ended up picking all of this up via osmosis.

Why I'd never played it is only a semi-mystery to me. The first *Monkey Island* came out in 1990, and I didn't own an Amiga until about 1993. Even then it was only in an attempt to placate Amiga owners, who were livid that *Digitiser* launched with no Amiga coverage.

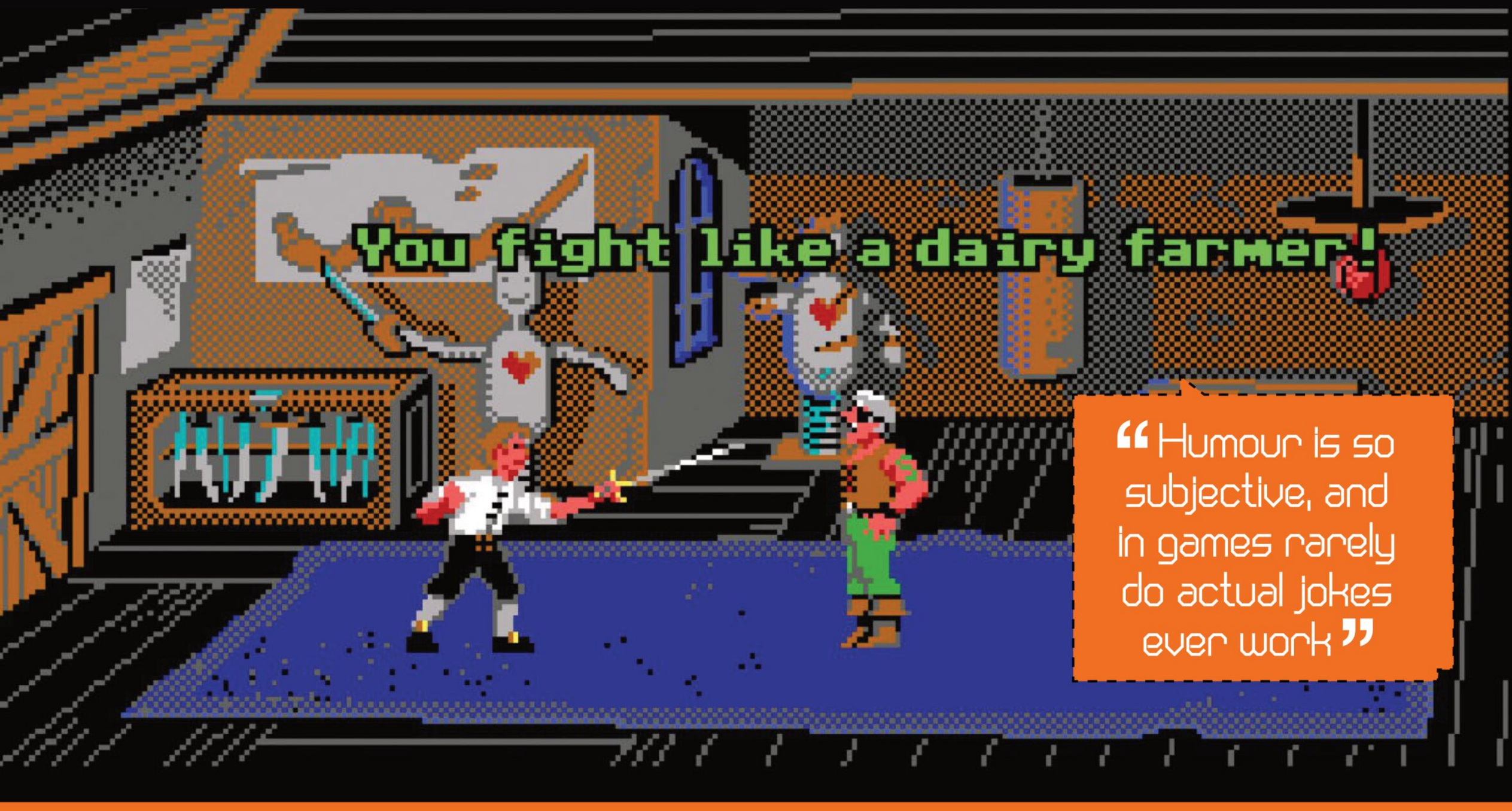
I had plenty of other, newer, games to review, and besides… I think there might've been part of me that wilfully, stubbornly, avoided the *Monkey Island* series simply because it was so popular. You know how it is when someone insists you listen to some band they like. The more they insist, the less likely you are to do it. Also, let's not forget that most Amiga owners hated *Digitiser*, and so… if they were banging on about something there was absolutely no way I was going to check it out.

And yet… I'd always remained curious. Humour is so subjective, and in games rarely do actual jokes ever work. Oh, I've laughed at games many times, but hardly ever for the reasons the developers intended. *Monkey Island*'s reputation was for being a bona-fide funny game.

I thought it was long overdue that I correct the error, and actually experience it first-hand. See what all the fuss was about. I mean, I'd been a massive fan of the point-and-click genre back in the day. It's something I really miss about modern games; there was a gentleness to point-and-click that's been lost in today's modern, immersive, adventures. I'm happy to report that, having now stepped foot on Mêlée Island™, I get why *Monkey Island* had such an impact. It's beautifully designed, with a better use of the SCUMM interface than other LucasArts games of the era. The music grated – to the point I found myself rushing through conversations – but *Monkey Island* is hardly the only game of the era to be guilty of that.

Where it truly shines, and I'm sure there are many of you reading this who are nodding with a 'we-told-you-so' smirk plastered across your lips, is the writing. I can't say I laughed out loud, but I certainly smiled throughout. It's such a witty game, and it's structured so precisely, from the broader plot to individual conversations. It never feels bloated, and it never drags – which is no small feat for a primarily text-based experience.

Next up on the playlist: *LeChuck's Revenge*! In about another 30 years. *




"Humour is so subjective, and in games rarely do actual jokes ever work"

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» [PC Engine] *Go Straight* started off in October 2019, with Dave writing about Namco's excellent *Splatterhouse*.

# Dave Cook

## If you love side-scrolling beat-'em-ups you'll love Dave's new book about the genre

The side-scrolling beat-'em-up has had something of a renaissance in recent years and it shows no signs of stopping. It's become so popular that the comic-book author Dave Cook has decided to delve into the genre with his incoming book, *Go Straight*. Here he tells us how it has come about.

### Why write *Go Straight*?

The side-scrolling beat-'em-up genre is by far my favourite, even today. My love of them started back in the early Nineties, when my dad would rent my sister and I a new Mega Drive game from the local Ritz Video every Friday after school. I had wanted to write a book about gaming for some time but I was dancing around a few different concepts. It was Dotemu's reveal of *Streets Of Rage 4* that cemented the idea, as it almost felt like the genre had come full circle after taking a big dip in the Noughties.

» Dave Cook found PunchPedia to be a great resource while he was compiling *Go Straight*.

### Who do you consider the pioneers of the genre and how will they be celebrated in your book?

*Go Straight* opens with Takashi Nishiyama's *Kung-Fu Master*, which was developed by Irem and released in 1984. Many regard that to be the grandfather of the beat-'em-up genre at large, so he's definitely a pioneer in that sense. You also have to tip your hat to Yoshihisa Kishimoto, creator of *Renegade* and *Double Dragon* for helping to define the gritty urban vibe that the genre is largely known for.

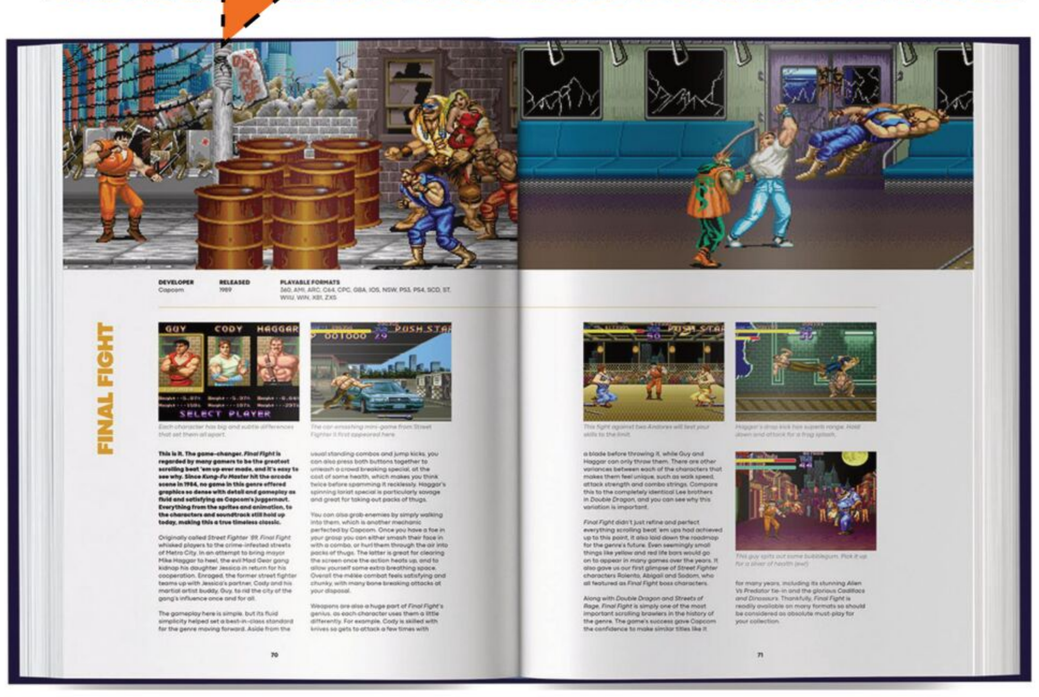
You also have to recognise Capcom's efforts as a whole. They made some of the finest side-scrollers in existence. Lastly, Yuzo Koshiro and his collaborators have to be applauded for their work on the *Streets Of Rage* trilogy. Kishimoto set the tone of the genre with *Double Dragon*, but Koshiro and his crew owned it thanks to the Nineties urban vibe, those pounding techno beats, and a ridiculous control system that squeezed so much out of Sega's three-button controller. We celebrate all of these pioneers in the book through detailed write-ups of their games, as well as some fun features.

### How long has *Go Straight* taken you to craft?

I started writing my first feature in October of 2019 and it was about *Splatterhouse*, and it even had a little boxout about the Famicom release *Splatterhouse: Wanpaku Grafitti*. But the biggest challenge I had at the outset was trying to work out how the book would look and feel, what the templates would be like and what

» *Go Straight*'s front cover is a who's who of characters from the genre. How many do you recognise?

> "You also have to tip your hat to Yoshihisa Kishimoto, creator of Renegade"
> **DAVE COOK**




» Dave feels Capcom's games are important to the genre, so expect more entries along the lines of *Final Fight*.

sort of tone the whole thing would be. Luckily, I pitched the book to Bitmap Books quite early on and they very quickly signed us up, so my designer mate Dan and I had a lot of helpful steer from the team. The final book is just this vibrant, colourful, nostalgic thing, with a great balance between write-ups and imagery. You'll learn a lot about these games and get to see some stunning visuals from them too.

**Will there be any interview-based content with famous developers?**
There are no straight interview features, but I did have input from a few people on some of the write-ups, including *Ninja Baseball Bat Man* creator Drew Maniscalco and *Streets Of Rage 4*'s Cyrille Imbert. They gave me more insight into how their games came to be and some anecdotes from behind the scenes.

**How will the book be structured?**
The book is chronological by original release date, so if a game came out first in Japan, that's the year we feature it in. It starts with *Kung-Fu Master* in 1984 and ends in 2020. Along the way we have decade dividers that talk about what the state of the genre and industry was like at the time (warning, the Noughties were a real low point for output in the genre – yeesh!)

**Does *Go Straight* just focus on console and arcade brawlers only, or will it feature computer releases as well?**
It's the whole lot. There are features on some early computer releases like the obscure *After The War* for the Spectrum and C64, and I just had to include *Renegade III: The Final Chapter*, for my sins. Moving on through the years, we also included

» [Saturn] Dave considers 3D brawlers like *Die Hard Arcade*, *Fighting Force* and *God Hand* to be important additions to the genre, and his book.

handheld brawlers like the surprisingly brilliant *TMNT* for Game Boy Advance, which is by the same talented folks who did *Scott Pilgrim Vs The World* at Ubisoft Montreal.

**What sort of interesting stuff did you discover whilst working on *Go Straight*?**
I discovered so much, but for me personally the biggest 'find' was just getting to play so many games in my favourite genre for the first time. Japan is especially rich with odd, but great releases. Fact wise, I discovered some pretty mad things. One that stands out is discovering that the PAL and North American release of Jaleco's *Brawl Brothers* on SNES also has the full Japanese version on the cartridge. It's far superior than the Western build, and you can unlock it by using a cheat code. To my knowledge it's the only SNES game that has this.

**How did the collaboration with Bitmap Books come about?**
It happened really fast, much to my surprise. I put together a couple of mock spreads with my mate Dan and I pitched Bitmap Books directly. They very quickly replied, we spoke a few times and then they asked if they could publish the project. They were the first publisher I pitched, so I was a little blown away.

**How did you get Yoshihisa Kishimoto to write the foreword?**
I owe Bitmap Books for that one. They tapped into their contacts rolodex and managed to get him on board. It's a genuine honour to have him open the book, considering all he's done for the genre. It really is a lovely introduction.

**Why do you think the genre has had a resurgence in recent years?**
Part of me thinks it's cyclical. Nostalgia is quite a bankable thing these days, and we often want to see the things we grew up with make a return in some form. But more positively, I think it's just because more developers are working in the genre again and together they're reminding us why this genre is so endearing.

---

***Go Straight* will be launched in February 2022 by bitmapbooks.co.uk. It will feature 500 pages and cost £34.99. Expect a review in the magazine soon.** ✱

» Dave hopes that, "You should come out of the book with a new appreciation for just how vast this genre is."

» Dave considers games that follow the *Double Dragon* format to be "absolute musts" to include.

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# BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

**JANUARY 2005** – The silly season might be over, but there's no time to relax – the first Nintendo DS game reviews are here, and Viewtiful Joe and Metal Gear Solid are both back. Excited? Nick Thorpe's got a time machine, so let's begin 2005 all over again

[PS2] Almost as good as *San Andreas*? The *Official PS2 Magazine* believed *Mercenaries* was that good.

## NEWS JANUARY 2005

**On 13 January, The Sun's main front page story was headlined "Harry The Nazi", and related to a photograph of Prince Harry wearing a Nazi German military uniform.** The photo was taken at a friend's private birthday party, which had the theme of "colonials and natives". The prince apologised "for any offence or embarrassment he has caused" in a statement through Clarence House, which further stated that he "realises it was a poor choice of costume".

The Republic Of Ireland, one of the few countries in the world using imperial speed limits, went metric on 20 January. Legal limits and related road signage were changed to kilometres per hour.

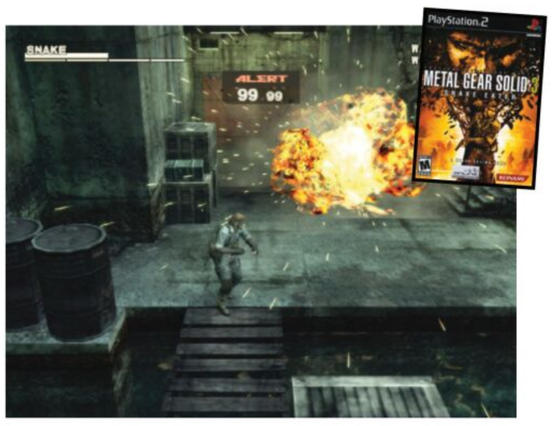
The trial of Michael Jackson formally began with jury selection on 31 January, as the popular singer faced charges of child molestation. Gavin Arvizo, who was 13 years old at the time of the alleged incidents, had appeared with Jackson in the documentary *Living With Michael Jackson* – a documentary in which Jackson told presenter Martin Bashir that he had slept in bed with children including Macaulay Culkin, with no sexual intention. Over nearly six months, the trial attracted media attention due to the celebrity status of the defendant and many witnesses. The jury took 32 hours to deliberate, and eventually returned a verdict of not guilty on all charges.

# THE LATEST NEWS FROM JANUARY 2005

**With the Nintendo DS having arrived in North America and Japan, the first import game reviews are starting to filter through.** The verdict? There are some good games, but nothing quite hitting that top level just yet. That's quite the surprise, as *Super Mario 64 DS* is a conversion of one of the best games ever made – but as *Edge* says in its 8/10 review, Nintendo's speedy delivery of the handheld "left it needing a revolutionary launch title and not enough time to make one". The magazine felt that the controls "will never feel like anything other than a compromise". *NGC*'s review also stated that the game was a "work of genius" that "doesn't work all that well with a touch screen", and awarded it 4/5. *GamesMaster* also felt that it was "nowhere near as magical" without the N64 controller, but that the mini games "bring the touch screen to life" and gave it 84%.

The American line-up was subject to scrutiny in both *NGC* and *GamesMaster*. *Asphalt: Urban GT* was agreed to be the worst game, earning 1/5 in *NGC* and 40% in *GamesMaster*, with the latter calling it "blocky and ugly". *The Urbz* (2/5 *NGC*, 70% *GM*), *Spider-Man 2* (3/5 *NGC*, 60% *GM*) and *Madden NFL 2005* (3/5 *NGC*, 72% *GM*) all received middling receptions, so Sonic Team's romantic minigame collection *Feel The Magic: XX/XY – Project Rub* in the UK – was the third-party highlight. *GamesMaster* gave it 84% and *NGC* awarded it 4/5, with the latter describing it as "the sort of experience that only DS can provide" but noting that it was "a bit short". *Edge* picked *Sawaru: Made In Wario* (*WarioWare Touched!*) – as the highlight of the Japanese line-up, giving it 8/10 for its "invention, surprise and excellence". The magazine also gave the puzzle game *Chokkan Hitofude* (*Polarium*) 7/10, describing it as "decidedly elegant" but "rather cold and uninvolving".

The post-Christmas season was particularly dry, with only two games earning scores above 6/10 in the *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine*. Pandemic Studios' sandbox military game *Mercenaries: Playground Of Destruction* scored 9/10, with the magazine declaring it "the definitive PS2 war game". The open world format drew comparisons with *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, with the reviewer stating that "outside of




[PS2] Reviewers were convinced that *Metal Gear Solid 3* would be the last. Spoiler: it wasn't.

[Xbox] It wasn't fresh or revolutionary, but *MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf* sure was pretty.

the obvious, no other game offers such alluringly varied thrills" and that "the on-foot action is a huge improvement". The other game was *Call Of Duty: Finest Hour*, with the World War II FPS earning 8/10 for being "fiercer, fresher and graphically finer than *Medal Of Honor: Rising Sun*". *NGC* also reviewed the game. "Perhaps we're too familiar with this sort of thing," Martin Kitts almost apologetically stated as he gave "The best World War II title on any console" 75%. *Official Xbox Magazine* gave it 7.0/10, describing it as "rushed and unpolished" and claiming that "it's doing nothing new at all".

Xbox owners probably had the best of things. *Official Xbox Magazine* noted that *MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf*'s "story, cutscenes and gameplay remain pretty much the same compared to the original" and that levels are "extremely linear". However, it earned 8.3/10 because, "While the gameplay might not be mind-blowing, the visual eye candy on offer certainly is." The "very unique experience", that was American McGee's action-adventure *Scrapland* earned 8.0/10. The sci-fi game's genre blending made it "affably accessible" but "doesn't give the game the depth it really needs to be outstanding". American sports trio *ESPN NBA 2K5*, *ESPN NFL 2K5* and *ESPN NHL 2K5* earned 8.9/10, 8.6/10 and 8.3/10 respectively.

That slow release schedule meant that magazines turned to import coverage for other platforms, too. "Does it sound absurd or sinister, virile or camp?" That was the question *Edge* asked of *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*'s subtitle, and the conclusion "would seem to be all of the above". Konami's PS2 exclusive stealth sequel was felt to be "curiously old-fashioned" in its segregation of story and action, but earned 8/10 for being "the most loveable, exasperating, unhinged, pretentious, ambitious, gorgeous, funny, tedious, thrilling, subversive and just plain silly *Metal Gear* yet". *GamesMaster* awarded the game 95%, praising it for its sense of scaled and "the most straightforward and (dare we say it?) moving" *Metal Gear Solid* story to date.

Over on the GameCube, Capcom's *Viewtiful Joe 2* earned a little bit of criticism from *Edge*, which implored you to "zoom in on those screenshots" in order to "make sure you're not seeing the exact same game that was reviewed some 18 months ago". The cel-shaded brawler was considered to be "not so much an extension as a remix," albeit a "capable and confident" one. That earned it 8/10, and *NGC* offered similar sentiments, saying that it was "pretty much more of the same" but was still "high quality and original (compared to most other stuff)" in an 87% review.

That'll do it for this month – join us again next time when we'll start getting the first import PSP reviews through, as well as the usual fun. ✱

[GameCube] Remember when *Call Of Duty* was just one of many World War II shooters? Crazy times.

[DS] The DS offered an expanded version of the most revolutionary 3D game, that was somehow lesser.

## CHARTS

### JANUARY 2005

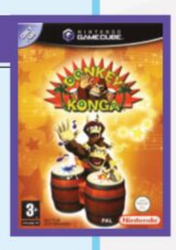
**PLAYSTATION 2**

1 – Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (Rockstar)
2 – Need For Speed Underground 2 (EA)
3 – WWE Smackdown! Vs Raw (THQ)
4 – FIFA Football 2005 (EA)
5 – The Getaway: Black Monday (Sony

**XBOX**

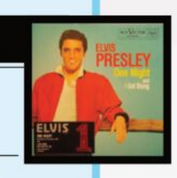
1 – Halo 2 (Microsoft)
2 – Need For Speed Underground 2 (EA)
3 – Pro Evolution Soccer 4 (Konami)
4 – FIFA Football 2005 (EA)
5 – GoldenEye: Rogue Agent (EA)

**GAMECUBE**




1 – Donkey Konga (Nintendo)
2 – FIFA Football 2005 (EA)
3 – Pikmin 2 (Nintendo)
4 – Tony Hawk's Underground 2 (Activision)
5 – WWE: Day Of Reckoning (THQ)

**MUSIC**

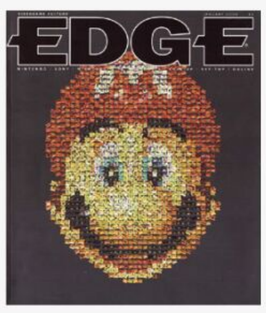



1 – One Night/I Got Stung (Elvis Presley)
2 – Empty Souls (Manic Street Preachers)
3 – Somebody Told Me (The Killers)
4 – Against All Odds (Steve Brookstein)
5 – Staring At The Sun (Rooster)

## THIS MONTH IN...

### GamesMaster

The 50 best games of the year have been ranked, and *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* takes the top spot ahead of *Half-Life 2* in second and *Halo 2* in third. *Burnout 3: Takedown* and *The Sims 2* rounded out the top five. "The let downs of 2004" included *Killzone*, *GoldenEye: Rogue Agent* and the continued delays to Sony's *Gran Turismo 4*.




### Edge

The 2004 *Edge* Awards are here, and the magazine claims that "sometimes there really is no contest" for best game, which went to *Half-Life 2* – also winner for the best visual design and innovation awards. Rockstar North was declared best developer, Nintendo best publisher, and the Nintendo DS took the award for best hardware.

### Official Xbox Magazine

"Japanese companies are warming to what they've seen regarding Xbox 2," says *OXM*. Why? Because Tecmo's president believes it will be a "success". That'll be the same Tecmo that provided Xbox exclusives such as *Ninja Gaiden*, whose general manager John Inada says "Xbox has a special place in our hearts".

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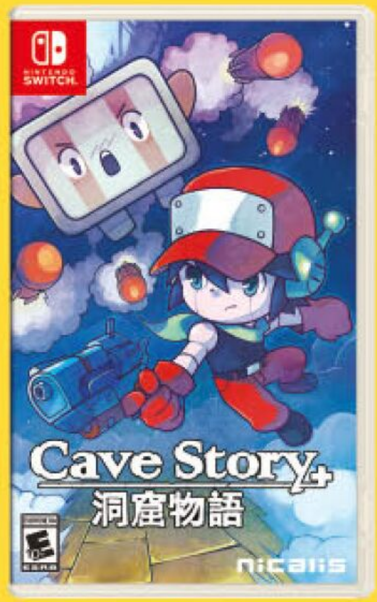



**'CAVE STORY+'**, The definitive version of the game that changed the world! A highly polished, finely tuned platform/shooting adventure that uses the appealing audio-visual aesthetics of classic 16-bit video games to draw players into a world deep with emotional storytelling, challenging twitch action and abundant surprises. **$29.99**

**'THE BINDING OF ISAAC: REPENTANCE'**, the unforgettable "final" chapter in the award-winning *Binding of Isaac* saga. Also coming to Nintendo Switch and Xbox Series X. **PREORDER $59.99**

**'ELLIOT QUEST'**, a retro-inspired 2D adventure/role-playing game in which players explore the mysterious island of Urele in search of ancient and powerful elemental spirits. Five dungeons to conquer, powerful bosses to defeat, countless treasures and hidden areas to discover. Easy to pick up but challenging to master. **$29.99**

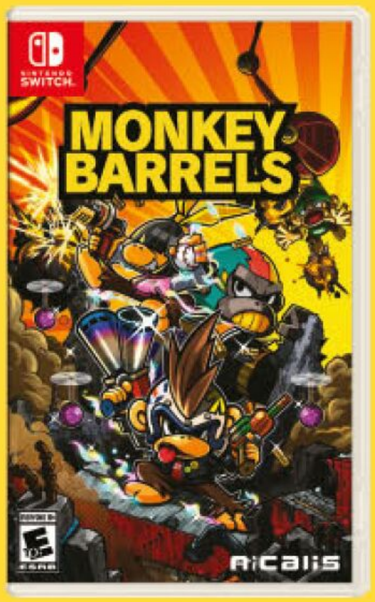
**'RUNNER3'**, completing the rhythm-based platformer trilogy with new branching paths, item shops, vehicles, Hero Quests, Retro Challenges and new characters. Also available for Nintendo Switch. **$39.99**

**'HYPERPARASITE'**, a relentless top-down twin-stick shooter that's different every time you play it. Your ability to discard one human host and take control of another means that the possibilities are practically limitless—each character type has different strengths, weaknesses, capabilities and weapons. Literally, your enemies are your extra lives! **$39.99**

**'THE END IS NIGH'**, a gauntlet of platform-jumping challenges from the creator of *Super Meat Boy* and *The Binding of Isaac*. Can you survive the end of the world? Also available for Nintendo Switch. **$39.99**

**'TINY BARBARIAN DX'**, engaging 2D platform action and combo-based hack-and-slash combat with retro-style pixel art and a loincloth-stirring chiptune soundtrack. Includes two-player cooperative play, bonus unlockable game modes and many secrets. With cover art by legendary *Famitsu* artist Susumu Matsushita. **$19.99**

**'WONDER BOY: THE DRAGON'S TRAP'**, a beautifully drawn and animated remake of the unforgettable Sega Master System classic *Wonder Boy III*. Also available for Nintendo Switch. **$39.99**




**'MONKEY BARRELS'**, an incredible twin-stick shooter from legendary Japanese game developer Good-Feel. A tag team of avenging monkeys attack with explosive "Wild Power" super moves and nearly 100 outrageous weapons, all made from household objects like bottles, cans, blow dryers, umbrellas and more. Includes instruction manual. **$39.99**

**'DUNGREED'**, An infinitely replayable roguelike action/platform game with procedurally generated levels, powerful magic items and insane weapons to discover. Also available for Nintendo Switch. **$29.99**

**'REMILORE: LOST GIRL IN THE LANDS OF LORE'**, a "rogue-lite" anime-style hack-and-slash adventure with devastating magic attacks and twin-stick controls Also available for Nintendo Switch. **$39.99**

**'KORG GADGET'**, a pro-quality music sequencer and mixer with 16 different "gadgets," virtual sound machines that can create nearly limitless waveforms and beats. Includes multiplayer options (local or online) that allow up to eight people to collaborate on making music. It's a digital audio workstation that plays like a game. **$49.99**

**'BLADE STRANGERS'**, a hardcore old-school fighting game developed by Studio Saizensen. The streamlined four-button control scheme makes it easy for beginners to deal out damage from day one…but the intricate combos, counters and specials give tournament-caliber players plenty of action. Also available for PS4. **$39.99**

**'CRYSTAL CRISIS'**, a cute and chaotic color-matching combat game with an all-star cast of outrageous characters. It's the ultimate puzzle battle throwdown! Also available for Nintendo Switch. **$39.99**

## NINTENDO SWITCH

| | |
|---|---|
| Blade Strangers | $39.99 |
| Cave Story+ | $29.99 |
| Crystal Crisis | $39.99 |
| Dungreed | $29.99 |
| Elliot Quest | $29.99 |
| HyperParasite | $39.99 |
| KORG Gadget | $49.99 |
| Monkey Barrels | $39.99 |
| Redout | $39.99 |
| RemiLore: Lost Girl in the Lands of Lore | $39.99 |
| Runner3 | $39.99 |
| The Binding of Isaac: Repentance (Preorder) | $59.99 |
| The End Is Nigh | $29.99 |
| Tiny Barbarian DX | $19.99 |
| Umihara Kawase Fresh! | $39.99 |
| Wonder Boy: The Dragon's Trap | $29.99 |

## PLAYSTATION 4

| | |
|---|---|
| Blade Strangers | $39.99 |
| Crystal Crisis | $39.99 |
| Dungreed | $29.99 |
| RemiLore: Lost Girl in the Lands of Lore | $39.99 |
| Runner3 | $39.99 |
| The Binding of Isaac: Afterbirth+ | $39.99 |
| The End Is Nigh | $29.99 |
| Umihara Kawase Fresh! | $39.99 |
| Wonder Boy: The Dragon's Trap | $29.99 |

## PLAYSTATION 5

| | |
|---|---|
| The Binding of Isaac: Repentance (Preorder) | $59.99 |

## XBOX SERIES X

| | |
|---|---|
| The Binding of Isaac: Repentance (Preorder) | $59.99 |

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# Galaxian

## MAKE THE SCREAMING STOP

» ARCADE » 1979 » NAMCO

**One of the great things about living near King's Park is the yearly fair that arrives.** Granted, nowadays it's a pretty crappy affair (at least from my own selfish viewpoint) as it's filled with overpriced token rides and most of the areas that used to be filled with arcade machines now house newer games, broken cabinets or two-pence machines which I believe our own Iain Lee refers to as the 'tuppenny shove'.

Back in the Eighties though, the fair at King's Park was without equal and I was introduced to many arcade games there, from *Space Invaders* to *Space Harrier*. As you may have already guessed, King's Park is where I experienced *Galaxian* and I remember it being a rather terrifying affair. I'd never go so far as to call *Space Invaders* a horror game, but it's definitely one that raises my anxiety levels whenever I play it. Even as a youngster, my heart would start beating faster as the invaders slowly sped up and marched ever onwards towards the bottom of the screen. It was tense, it was frantic and I genuinely felt that nothing could ever possibly top it. Until of course *Galaxian* came along and said, "Hold my beer."

When I first encountered *Galaxian* it left me feeling both excited and terrified. Excited because it looked like a phenomenal graphical leap over the black and white visuals of *Space Invaders*; terrified because those colourful invaders were far more aggressive than their counterparts in Taito's world-conquering arcade hit. In addition to peppering you with bullets and giving you no bunkers to hide behind, the invaders in *Galaxian* dive-bombed you, and screamed while doing so. Hearing those digital wails at a young age (I couldn't have been more than ten) was as exhilarating as it was terrifying and I dreaded each incoming wave and would attempt to shoot them down as quickly as possible.

Obviously, I know better than to do that now as you can potentially amass more points, but as a young child I simply needed that horrible noise to stop and the best way to do that was to finish off the buggers before they could start screaming at me. Silence is golden.

# EVERCADE VS

# DE LEVELS UP

AFTER A YEAR AND A HALF ON THE MARKET, BLAZE ENTERTAINMENT'S EVERCADE IS ABOUT TO RECEIVE NEW GAMES AND HARDWARE THAT TAKE THE PLATFORM TO PLACES IT HASN'T PREVIOUSLY BEEN. WE SPEAK TO THE TEAM ABOUT HOW THE EVERCADE VS AND ARCADE CARTRIDGES HAVE COME TO BE

WORDS BY NICK THORPE

**In the constantly evolving world of retro gaming hardware, the Evercade is a unique proposition.** Most devices aimed at nostalgic gamers typically fall into one of two categories. There are devices like the Mega Drive Mini and the PlayStation Classic, plug-and-play consoles with fixed libraries of classic games. Then there are consoles like Analogue's Mega Sg or Hyperkin's RetroN 5, which run games from their original media. The Evercade's officially licensed games are sold on cartridges, theoretically combining the best of both approaches – your game library can continuously expand, with a supply of new cartridges that allows for easy access to games that may be rare and expensive in their original forms.

In case you're not yet familiar with the Evercade platform, up until now it has been exclusively available as a handheld system, originally launched back in May 2020. Though the handheld suffered from some early teething issues with control layouts and HDMI output, the console drew praise from various critics – ourselves included – for being affordable and well built, and offering a unique approach to the market. Since then, the aforementioned issues have been resolved and the format has gained a foothold in the market. "We are very pleased with the Evercade handheld sales. Launching a new console in the middle of 2020 was a real challenge, but the reaction has been amazing and we have a great community of fans that enjoy collecting for the system," says Andrew Byatt, managing director at Evercade manufacturer Blaze Entertainment. "We started with ten cartridges available and after eighteen months we have twenty-six for the system which will continue in the years ahead."

What has been exciting about the Evercade to date is that it has covered a broad base of retro gaming. The initial ten cartridges included compilations from recognisable names like Namco, Interplay and Data East, and since then other big name compilations including *Worms* and *Codemasters* cartridges have launched. But the true value may be in the less well recognised cartridges – for example, the Atari Lynx library is rarely revisited elsewhere, but it has been the subject of two compilations on the Evercade. Developers of modern retro games are also represented on cartridges such as the Mega *Cat Studios* and *Indie Heroes* collections – in fact two modern Mega Drive games, *Xeno Crisis* and *Tanglewood*, are bundled together on one Evercade cartridge for half the price they retail for on Steam. You're as likely to find new retro-inspired favourites as you are to revisit favourite games of the past.

**ANDREW BYATT**

Managing director, Blaze Entertainment

**SEAN CLEAVER**

Head of marketing, Blaze Entertainment

**RYAN DEKKER**

Head of technology, Blaze Entertainment

**AMY MCHUGH**

Head of creative, Blaze Entertainment

VS

▶ But as well as the Evercade has developed so far, it has definitely been a system that has required a certain degree of compromise from players. For a start, all the cartridges contained home console games, so while you could enjoy arcade classics like *Pac-Man*, *Double Dragon* and *Burger Time*, you'd be doing so via their NES conversions. Strong multiplayer games like *Sensible Soccer* and *River City Ransom* have been available, but without any way to link handhelds, it was impossible to share the fun. The Evercade's controls have always been good, but that diamond button layout never does feel quite right for games that originated on the Mega Drive. Blaze is now hoping to do away with most of those compromises, as it gears up to deliver new launches that constitute the first major evolution of the Evercade platform.

**The most eye-catching part of the upgrade is the launch of the Evercade VS – a new home console which runs all but two of the existing Evercade cartridges, and adds a number of new features.** "The main focus was to create a cost-effective and accessible way to play multiple games across many consoles, which was capable of high-accuracy emulation and a great user experience," says Ryan Dekker, head of technology at Blaze. "Whilst we are priced similar to a mini console and other emulation products on the market, we wanted to make sure we took the best elements of each and then do things not done before. This involved such things as adding four-player couch play for everyone to play together, 1080p output, high-accuracy gameplay for all our games and above all else, ease of use."

The ability to play multiplayer games is easily the biggest new feature, finally allowing you to access those features in existing cartridges as well as those going forward. Four USB ports support the new Evercade VS controller, which is very similar to the existing handheld setup but with two extra shoulder buttons. Alternatively, you can use your own existing USB controllers. "We are retro gamers at heart and we are aware that everyone has their own preferred controller," says Ryan. "So we didn't want to force users to use a specific controller and wanted to let people use what they are most comfortable with. We also wanted to add support for the adaptive controller and special controllers to open up the console to all players." Putting this to the test, we were able to get official and third-party PS3, PS4, Xbox 360 and Xbox One

# CONSOLES COMPARED

## THE KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE EVERCADE HANDHELD AND THE EVERCADE VS, AT A GLANCE

*Not compatible with *Namco Museum Collection 1* and *2*

» [Evercade VS] We wouldn't be surprised if the *Technos Arcade 1* cartridge created quite a few fans of *The Combatribes*.

» [Evercade VS] *Tumblepop* is on the *Data East Arcade 1* cart, and is a fun platformer in the style of *Bubble Bobble*.

controllers hooked up by using the simple mapping screen. While it's inevitable that some controllers won't work this way – our Switch Pro Controller didn't – it does mean that you can potentially use your favourite pads and arcade sticks, and could save a bit of money on extra controllers.

New graphical features are the next biggest addition, and 1080p output is only the start. It's a nice start, mind – of the licensed retro consoles we've tested, only the premium priced Capcom Home Arcade has offered it before. "To the best of our knowledge, 1080p upscaling across single emulators (let alone multiple) hasn't been achieved before with the same level of emulation accuracy and hardware price point in a commercial product," says Ryan. "It is certainly a technical achievement that we are quite proud of as we spent a lot of effort tuning the hardware and emulation to achieve this." The other point of interest is the inclusion of additional display options, including the long requested ability to add scanlines. "We have been asked for these kinds of features from day one. The original premise for the handheld was to make it simple. It was simple back when these games originally came out and the Evercade was designed to be easy to use to match that experience," Andrew explains. "We are fans of adding features that feel right for the platform and its community and we love to listen and find out what people want. But ultimately making it ever more complex is not in our minds. Plug the cart in and play, no fuss – that's always been our aim."

Another feature that has been added is Wi-Fi connectivity. Right now this is one that doesn't do anything too exciting, as it solely offers a way to update the console, but it offers a lot of potential. "We put Wi-Fi in to make updates easier, of course, and we hope the handheld updates can be simplified," says Andrew. "But over time, Wi-Fi opens up the potential to add features that are expected from the community, and some ideas we already have that will be unexpected." Sean Cleaver, head of marketing at Blaze, goes on to elaborate a little on what those possibilities may include. "Many suggestions such as achievements, leaderboards and online play have all been suggested, all of which will require a lot of work and testing to make sure the experience everyone gets is enjoyable, so nothing is 100% planned yet. But it also enables us to add cool little extras and secrets from time to time as well."

**While the Evercade VS offers a number of steps up from the existing Evercade handheld experience, the new console is very much meant to complement the existing hardware, rather than replace it.** If you already have the handheld, you won't need to purchase the Evercade VS to benefit from a significant chunk of the improvements it brings, as a version of the new user interface will be coming to the handheld via a firmware update. "It's almost like for like," says Amy McHugh, head of creative at Blaze. "There are some layout adjustments to work within the smaller handheld screen size. Display options will include bezels, aspect ratio and scanlines. Themes for handheld are currently not planned. Controller mappings are designed in a table format as opposed to the diagram you see on the VS, to keep the text at a legible size."

However, having both pieces of hardware does give you some nice benefits. For a start, Blaze ▶

# ARCADE ACTION

## WE'VE HAD HANDS-ON TIME WITH TWO OF THE NEW ARCADE CARTS – HERE ARE SOME FIRST IMPRESSIONS

■ The new arcade cartridges are here, and they deliver exactly what you'd expect – original arcade games, just as you remember. There are some obvious things that come along with that, such as a lack of a dedicated pause button (you'll have to open the console's menu) and the need to insert credits using the select button. Some games use a vertical display as they did in the arcade, which generally looks fine but can be a little cramped on the handheld's screen. There's no tate mode for those of you who like to rotate your monitors, and no dip switch options we could find either.

Fighting fans will be most likely to appreciate the *Technos Arcade 1* cartridge, which includes the beat-'em-ups *The Combatribes*, *Double Dragon II: The Revenge* and *Double Dragon III: The Rosetta Stone*, as well as the wrestling game *Mania Challenge*. *Minky Monkey* is a slice of history, being the first ever Technos arcade game, 3D *Tetris*-alike *Block Out* is an interesting brainteaser, and *Mysterious Stones: Dr John's Adventure* is a top-down *Indiana Jones* tribute. *Battle Lane Vol 5* sees you get on a motorbike and shoot other drivers – presumably for a can of petrol or something.

*Data East Arcade 1* is the more varied of the two we tried, offering everything from the maze game fun of *Lock 'N Chase* to the run-and-gun action of *Sly Spy*. *Chain Reaction* is another name for the very lovely *Magical Drop*, *Burger Time* is a classic action game and the platformer *Tumblepop* shouldn't be ignored. The isometric brawlers *Gate Of Doom* and *Wizard Fire* add some nice fantasy violence to the mix, but if you'd rather rescue Ronnie, *Bad Dudes Vs Dragon Ninja* is there too. Shoot-'em-ups *BreakThru* and the evolution inspired *Darwin 4078* cap things off here.

# BETTER WITH FRIENDS

## WHICH GAMES IN THE EXISTING EVERCADE RANGE GAIN A BOOST FROM THE VS?

### CODEMASTERS COLLECTION 1

■ While this packed cart has plenty to do for solo players, there are some particularly good multiplayer games to be had here. *Super Skidmarks* and *Tennis All-Stars* both originally used the innovative J-Cart to support four players, and some heated rivalries will surely reignite over the all-time classic *Sensible Soccer*.

### WORMS COLLECTION 1

■ Multiplayer action is the heart and soul of the *Worms* series, making it a natural addition to the library of anyone who wants to enjoy the Evercade with friends. While you could play pass-the-pad with the handheld's TV output, we'd wager that the VS will be a more fitting home.

### PIKO INTERACTIVE COLLECTION 2

■ Sports fans have plenty to pick from here, with football, American football and basketball games in pairs – highlights include *Beast Ball* and *Hoops: Shut Up And Jam*. Fans of racing games will particularly enjoy *Top Racer 2*, with *Eliminator Boat Duel* and *Full Throttle: All American Racing* as alternatives.

### TECHNOS COLLECTION 1

■ If you're up for some competitive sports action, *Super Dodge Ball* and *Super Spike V'Ball* should prove fun. If you prefer co-op, the best way to play beat-'em-ups is to partner up with a friend, and this pack offers *Super Double Dragon*, *Double Dragon II: The Revenge* and *River City Ransom*.

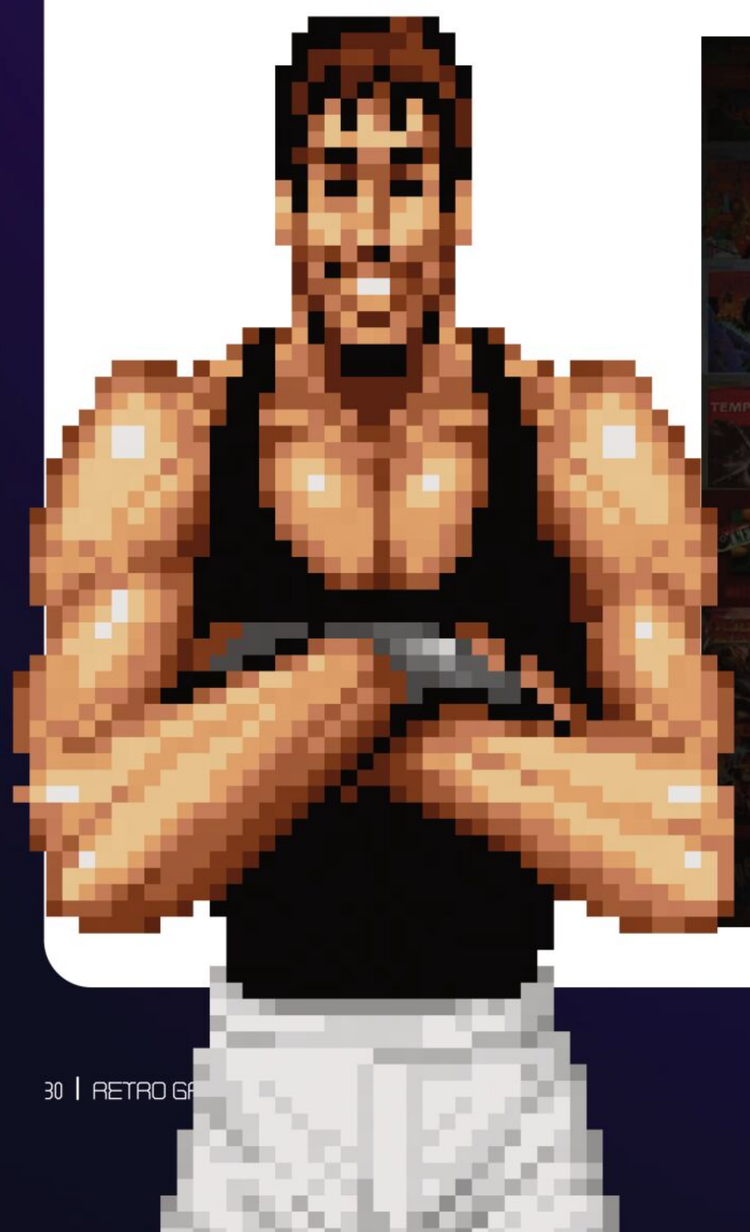
### JALECO COLLECTION 1

■ As with the Technos collection, this offers co-op beat-'em-ups and competitive sports games. The brawlers are the star attractions here, as you can team up with a friend in both *Rival Turf* and *Brawl Brothers*, while the sports offerings are *Super Goal 2* and the baseball game *Bases Loaded*.

» [Evercade VS] New to the Evercade is the ability to add scanlines. We're not using it here.

» [Evercade VS] This is what the game looks like when we switch the scanlines setting to Subtle.

» [Evercade VS] The scanlines are set to Strong here – that's the highest option you've got on the console.



» [Evercade VS] *Wizard Fire* looks pretty awesome, with this dragon stomping around and breathing fire everywhere.

is releasing a dedicated link cable that connects the Evercade handheld to the Evercade VS, for use as an extra controller. Additionally, as well as the games being designed to work across both systems, the save states are too – since they're stored on the cartridge, you should be able to load your game regardless of which system you last used. "It was really key to make sure all those that had bought carts already didn't have to buy them again for another type of system. Compatibility of our cartridges is very important," says Andrew. "We liked the idea that you can play the handheld on the move or in bed, away from a TV and then when you wanted big screen fun with others the VS can deliver that experience without losing your progress. We were very conscious that the device was good value for money which makes it a complimentary purchase rather than an either/or decision."

The idea that the Evercade VS should complement the existing Evercade range also extends to the design of the console – it definitely looks like a part of the Evercade family, particularly when you see the controllers. However, its retro appearance also evokes some NES nostalgia with its wide cartridge lid and similar colour scheme. "We looked back at classic consoles as our main inspiration for the Evercade VS. We wanted to evoke the same excitement and nostalgia as these late greats do when we see and play them," says Amy. "You can see this influence in the main body shape of the console – its retro, boxy form makes you just want to hold it. And its groundedness – being short, wide and deep like consoles of the past really evokes nostalgia." Of course, the look couldn't be entirely drawn from the Eighties. "We wanted to add a modern twist, and you can see that hinted at with a few contemporary curves, the light bar and perhaps a more minimal design approach in terms of shapes as well as silkscreen artwork."

**Another design feature that is more inspired by modern gaming is the idea of having two cartridge slots.** "This was an idea that came up in early development. We felt that the mini consoles often offered 20 to 50 games on the screen at one time and modern consoles often have libraries of downloaded games," says Andrew. "People are used to seeing a large choice of games on the screen and we thought the dual cart idea would mean we could have double the number of games to choose from. We started to explore what this would mean and we felt it added value to the experience." While it will be nice to be able to switch between sets of games without having to change the cartridge every time, that's not the only use of the feature, as Andrew explains. "This feature has given us a great way to add some extra features and secrets into the experience of those older games, so even long-time Evercade fans have the ability to get something new from what they already own." See more about that in our It's A Secret boxout.

What really matters is what goes in the cartridge slot, whether it's the dual ones of the Evercade VS or the handheld's singular port, and that's where the next big upgrade is to be found. December will see six cartridges launched at once, the most since the ten that accompanied the launch of the handheld last year. Two of these are traditional console collections, *Intellivision Collection 1* and *Bitmap Brothers Collection 1*, but the other four are the first cartridges from a new range exclusively dedicated to arcade games. These initial carts represent Atari, Data East, Gaelco and Technos, and are distinguished by their own numbering scheme and new purple packaging. Arcade cartridges work on both the Evercade handheld and the Evercade VS, and will retail for the same £14.99 price as the previous cartridges. The Evercade VS comes packaged with one or two of them, depending on the package you choose.

Arcade games have been a major request from players since the launch of the Evercade, and getting them has been a complex process. "The first thing we did was to make sure we could get arcade games and we went to multiple licensors that we've already worked with in order to get the best of the catalogues available," explains Sean. "We knew from the earlier Evercade launches what games people would like so once we'd tested the games and made sure they worked without fault or issue, we made the decision on the line-up. It was important to get new games and especially those that previously have not been accessible to retro fans for whatever reason so we also had to make sure we understood what was actually in the original games, so we knew what to look out for." Of course, when you're putting a consumer produce out there, it's not simply a case of slapping some ROM files on an SD card. Sean describes the process as involving "months (and I mean months) of testing, recording

» Looking at the Evercade VS from the front, you can see the unusual dual cartridge slots.

» [Evercade VS] Here's the new Pixel Perfect display mode in action, on the Atari 7800 game *Food Fight*.

» [Evercade VS] Here's the original aspect ratio option on the same game, for the sake of comparison.

footage, screenshots, getting ratings from the classification boards, and then making sure Ryan was able to work the magic on getting the games to the most optimised they can be".

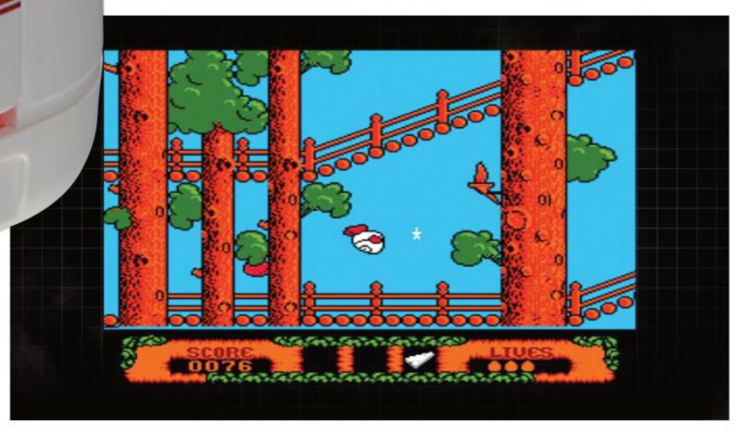
Ryan's duties there can take up quite a lot of time. "I would estimate that we spent about 40% of the VS development cycle on improving emulation," he explains. "We also sponsored a number of improvement works on the emulators and were able to push them back upstream to benefit existing community projects. Notably, we did a *lot* of work on the community build of the Intellivision and arcade emulators." The addition of the arcade games didn't just impact the development of the Evercade VS. "We had to do an equal amount of tuning on the handheld and VS to achieve our desired outcome. Notably, we rewrote the input handling system and improved GPU/CPU performance for the handheld overall." Ryan tells us. "The rest of the optimisations were made to the emulators themselves to run more efficiently. Thankfully all these improvements are included on the carts so no firmware updates are required."

In fact, the new cartridges are largely ones that Ryan considers to be trickier than usual. "Occasionally we will have the odd 16-bit or 32-bit title which will require some special attention, however games that generally require a lot of attention are Intellivision and arcade titles. Intellivision is mainly mapping but arcade emulation usually involves performance tweaks, backporting fixes and getting the best configuration for the game." This would explain the aforementioned amount of work on the community emulators used – FreeINTV in the case of the Intellivision, alongside others such as Stella for the Atari 2600, Nestopia for the NES and MAME for arcade.

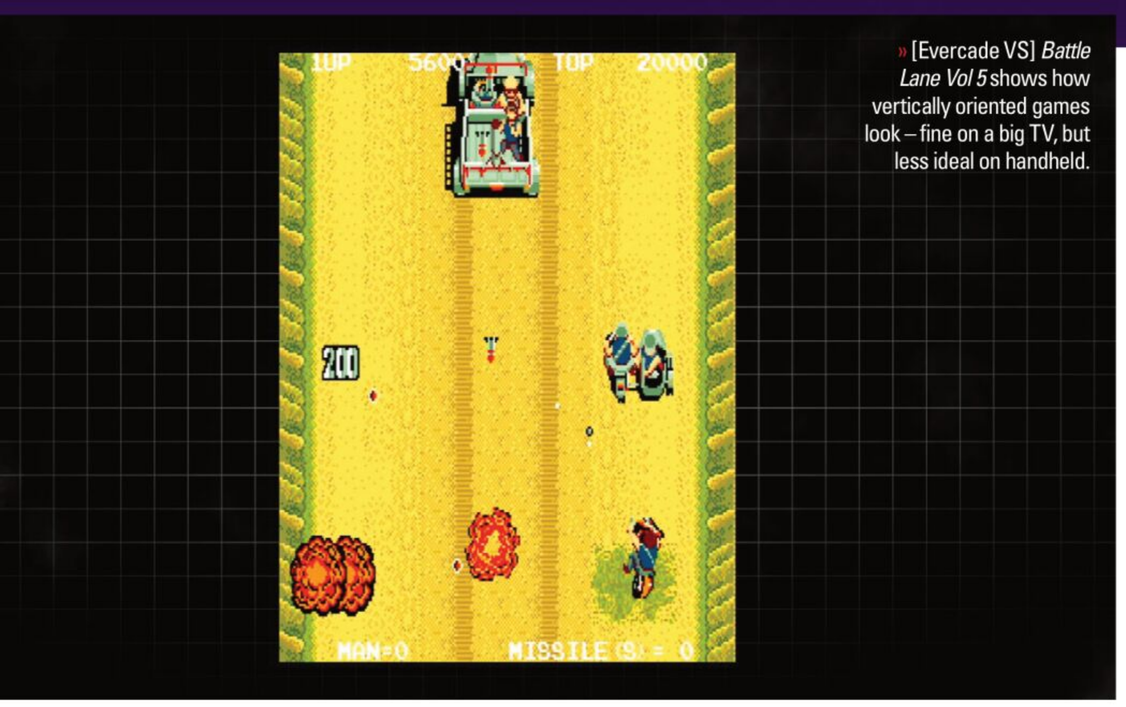
**While we're just about to receive a glut of new releases, Blaze is already looking ahead and has announced its first cartridge for 2022, *Renovation Collection 1*.** This features a dozen games including *Arcus Odyssey*, *El Viento*, *Sol-Deace* and *Valis 3*, many of which are now hard to pick up at a reasonable price. We wondered how much of a factor that plays in game selection. "Rarity is a nice bonus, for sure. Our deals can help bring games that are quite inaccessible to collectors or enthusiasts to the Evercade and to the public. What is more of a consideration than value is appeal and intrigue," Sean replies. "*Renovation* is a great example as the games were never released in Europe, so for the vast majority of our audience, these were only available as import games. The *Gaelco Arcade* collection will be the first-ever home release of those games (*World Rally* almost made it to PlayStation back in the mid-Nineties). Giving people something that's otherwise hard to experience is the most primary decision factor when it comes to rarity."

That leads us into a more general discussion of the process of putting together an Evercade cart. In many ways, this process represents all of the biggest unseen struggles that the team has, right from the start of the licensing process. "Signing content for a brand-new platform was definitely a huge challenge back in 2019/2020. Lots of hard work went into talking to IP owners in those early days," says Andrew. "We knew we had a good idea, but it was unproven and that generally makes it much more difficult." Sean brings up a similar point, but looks to the future rather than the past. "We have multiple licence targets now that require a lot of hard research to find out who owns them so we can get them – that's the kind of sleuthing I really enjoy, formerly being a writer." Amy's difficulty is one we can relate to – even when publishers are willing to work with you, they don't always have all the material for their old games. "Finding high-resolution box art is often quite a challenge. Worst case scenario there might be just one tiny resolution poster kicking about the recesses of the internet completely destroyed by anti-aliasing."

» That red light bar along the front is actually capable of displaying various colours, as you see when the machine is turned on.




» [Evercade VS] Being based in the UK, the Blaze team takes local nostalgia for characters such as *Dizzy* into account.




» [Evercade VS] *Battle Lane Vol 5* shows how vertically oriented games look – fine on a big TV, but less ideal on handheld.

» [Evercade VS] *Sly Spy* is nice to see on *Data East Arcade 1*, as the arcade version was not available to buy at all until relatively recently.

From there comes the actual process of selecting the games. "Fun is always part of it, as well as the playability of a game. We don't particularly want to put a game on that is purposefully obtuse like many console games were in order to bump their rental value," Sean tells us. "Then we also add a nostalgia value to it. Do we remember it, do our community remember it, and is it something we think they'll enjoy? There's always thought as well if there's a rare gem or a forgotten classic but it doesn't guarantee its inclusion. We know our community wants games that have been available for years on multiple formats, but they want to play them on Evercade." Naturally, technical factors play a part too. "Finally, can we actually fit it on the cartridge, especially if we have the option of disc-based games?"

**On that technical note, we've seen the hardware stretched further than the initial cartridges suggested.** Some recent Evercade cartridges feature games that originated on the Game Boy Advance and even the PlayStation. Just how far can things go? "We've been open that we know the hardware is capable of running 32-bit systems and some cartridge-based 64-bit options too," says Sean, before getting back to that age old bugbear. "A big problem when you get to disc-based games is the amount of storage they take up, which then impacts the number of games you can have. It'd be great to bring more from those platforms though, and others that we've not been able to touch yet. There's plenty of life in pre-DVD era gaming." There's even the

# WHAT'S ON THE MENU?

## A CLOSER LOOK AT THE NEW USER INTERFACE FOR THE EVERCADE VS

■ The menu system on the Evercade handheld has been functional and little more, up until now. You could flick through games one at a time, each one displaying basic information, box art and a screenshot. The Evercade VS will introduce a new user interface that offers a much more attractive and useful display of your games – you can see more of your games at one time, and you no longer have to reach for the instruction manual to get an overview of a game's controls. According to Amy McHugh, this all comes from the experience of working with the handheld. "Lessons we learned in the team, and also lessons we learned from the community, together they provided the foundations for how we approached the VS," she explains. "From big things like the addition of a games details page that immerse you into fun facts, control info and beautiful banner art, to the tiny things like adding % battery indicator – we used everything we learned from the handheld to evolve the VS to be a new and improved user experience.

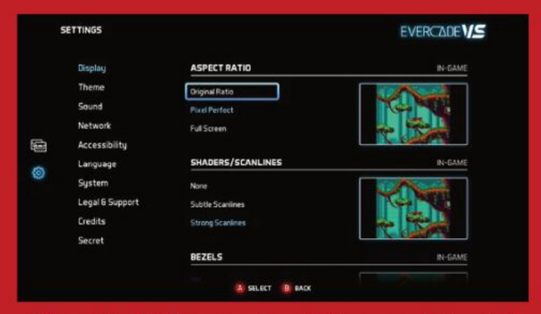
"We wanted user-flow to be intuitive. So we worked with UX designer and Evercade superfan, Andrew Novak, who mapped out every screen testing user-flows. We also improved the saving experience – saves now have screengrab visuals and you can load last save for quick loading."

It's also possible to choose menu themes, including a high contrast version for accessibility, and bezels to go alongside the game displays. Blaze intends to add to the initially available ones in the future. "In terms of themes, one I'm definitely keen to get going on is an 8/16-bit pixel art theme," says Amy. "We are also thinking about cart-specific and game-specific themes and bezels that will be exclusive to new cartridge releases if it makes sense for the franchise. Watch this space!"

» [Evercade VS] The new game menu shows off box art nicely and can have various themes applied.

» [Evercade VS] Game information now includes a full description, a banner and controls. Note the 'Last Save' option too.

» [Evercade VS] The screenshots that accompany your saves should be a massive help in identifying the right ones to load.




» [Evercade VS] The new visual options are deliberately simple, but a welcome addition to the console.




» The controller is similar in form factor to the handheld, but you can see the extra shoulder buttons here.

» [Evercade VS] We haven't actually managed to get this screen to yield any treasure yet. We'll keep trying though.

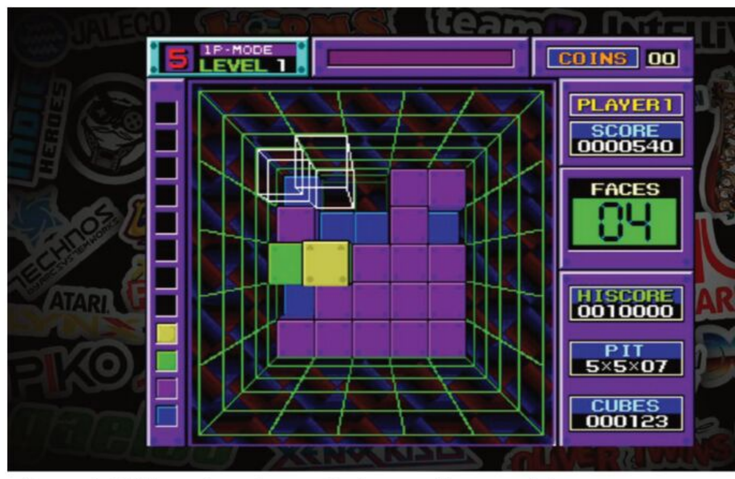
# IT'S A SECRET

## A LOOK AT THE MANY HIDDEN BONUSES THAT LURK INSIDE THE EVERCADE VS

■ One of the best things about classic gaming is discovering secrets, and there are quite a few to be found within the Evercade VS. The ones you might have already heard about are the bonus games that are unlocked through the use of the dual cartridge slots. These are relatively easy to discover – if you put in two cartridges that are related to each other, check the total count of games at the top of the screen and if it's one more than you expect, you've got a bonus game, though you do have to hunt to find out which one it is. We've found a few – if you want an early spoiler for one of them, turn the page upside down.

Beyond that, there are more hidden games lurking away inside the system that can be unlocked using button codes in the system's menu. We won't say how many of these we've seen, but we will say that they do have some similar themes running through them. We've been allowed to reveal one of them – again, turn the page upside down to see that. Lastly, there's a mysterious option simply named 'Secret' lurking in the settings menu, and selecting it brings up an on-screen keyboard. Right now, we don't know what this option will unlock – it could be more games, but it could be all sorts of other things. But then again, we like a little mystery in our lives. Not knowing is half the fun, don't you think?

» [Evercade VS] As great as the Atari 2600 version of *Missile Command* is, it will be nice to have the arcade version available.




» [Evercade VS] A good puzzle game is always welcome, and the 3D object manipulation in *Block Out* is certainly tough to learn.

» [Evercade VS] *Sensible Soccer* plays as well as ever, so you should expect to become hooked on multiplayer again.

» [Evercade VS] Old favourites can appear in unexpected places, as *Way Of The Exploding Fist* is on *Piko Interactive Collection 1*.

» This combination of cartridges definitely doesn't unlock any hidden goodies. We checked and everything.

DUAL CARTRIDGE SYSTEM
EVERCADE VS
ATARI COLLECTION 1
1) Atari Collection 1 and 2 unlocks the Atari 7800 version of Dark Chambers. 2) On the main screen, with any cartridge inserted, press L2 + R2 + Select.

» [Evercade VS] Multiplayer games like *Super Skidmarks* are a big part of the appeal of the Evercade VS.

possibility of non-emulated, native ports of games. "I think it's something you'll definitely see more of and we're actively working on it, in order to help expand the available selection of brilliant retro-inspired indie games out there right now, and maybe the odd classic here and there," Sean tells us. "Hopefully, 2022 will bring good news on that front."

**As exciting as those possibilities are, there are some less positive possibilities that do bear mention.** One worry at this point is the potential for the Evercade market to split. As we mentioned earlier, there are two cartridges that will not work on the Evercade VS – *Namco Museum Collection 1* and *2*. These have been excluded due to the terms of the licensing agreement Blaze and Bandai Namco reached, and when the cartridges are inserted into the Evercade VS, nothing will happen. This does mean that favourites like *Pac-Man* and *Dig Dug* remain handheld only for the time being, but the technical capability is there to resolve the issue. "The firmware updates would allow us to bring updates to all our cartridges, so yes, if the *Namco Museum* collections become available to use on the VS in future, this will be included via an update," says Sean. Of course, adding the Evercade VS to the existing licences is far from guaranteed to happen, but this is at least a situation that is unlikely to pop up again – future licensing agreements should take both pieces of hardware into account.

Although the handheld currently runs two cartridges that the Evercade VS can't, if you're reading this as an owner of the Evercade handheld with no plans to get the VS, you may be wondering if this will go the other way in the future. There's an undeniable difference in power between the two systems – could it eventually result in games that don't run on the handheld? According to Andrew, it's not on the cards right now and much of the additional power is already being used, but it can't be ruled out completely. "It is our plan to make games compatible on both systems for as long as is feasible. The spec of the VS is an upgrade on the handheld, but it does deliver 1080p instead of 720p which is an additional demand already," he explains. "We would have to think long and hard if an opportunity to sign a huge game came up that worked on the VS and not the handheld. Most likely we would talk to the community and see what the consensus was."

But while that statement suggests that we are unlikely to see VS-specific cartridges any time soon, there are games that handheld owners definitely can't access at the moment. Specifically, there is no way for handheld players to play the bonus games that are accessed via the dual cartridge slots of the Evercade VS. "We don't have that plan in mind for the current handheld, but we will look at the way that the handheld and VS could interact," Andrew explains, before raising an intriguing possibility. "Who knows? Future models of these devices may have inbuilt games alongside the cartridges on offer, which could interact in interesting ways."

If you've not yet tried the Evercade, the handheld is out now and will run all the games. If you want to buy the Evercade VS, that has unfortunately slipped slightly from its planned November launch. Players in Europe are currently looking to receive their consoles from 8-17 December, while players in North America should expect to see theirs in around 14 January 2022. "We want to make Evercade the go-to place for physical, licensed retro gaming, whether it be arcade, home computer, or console games. This is our mission," says Andrew. "Arcade games were always in the plan, but harder to implement well. We intend to have more arcade and many more games of all formats for the future. There is no limit in our minds on this and so much to bring to our console." He also takes a moment to address the future of the hardware. "We will be focusing on how to make the games be even better to play and looking at the ways people like to play them. That will dictate our strategy."

When the Evercade originally launched in 2020, it was regarded with some scepticism and that was a fair position to take – as we mentioned, the handheld system had some teething issues and did involve a lot of compromises. Having tried the Evercade VS and the arcade cartridges for ourselves, we're confident that those compromises are largely concerns of the past. That's a big step forward, and should leave players better able to appreciate the Evercade's unique approach to retro gaming. It seems like the platform has a bright future ahead of it, and we're looking forward to seeing how it continues to grow and evolve. *

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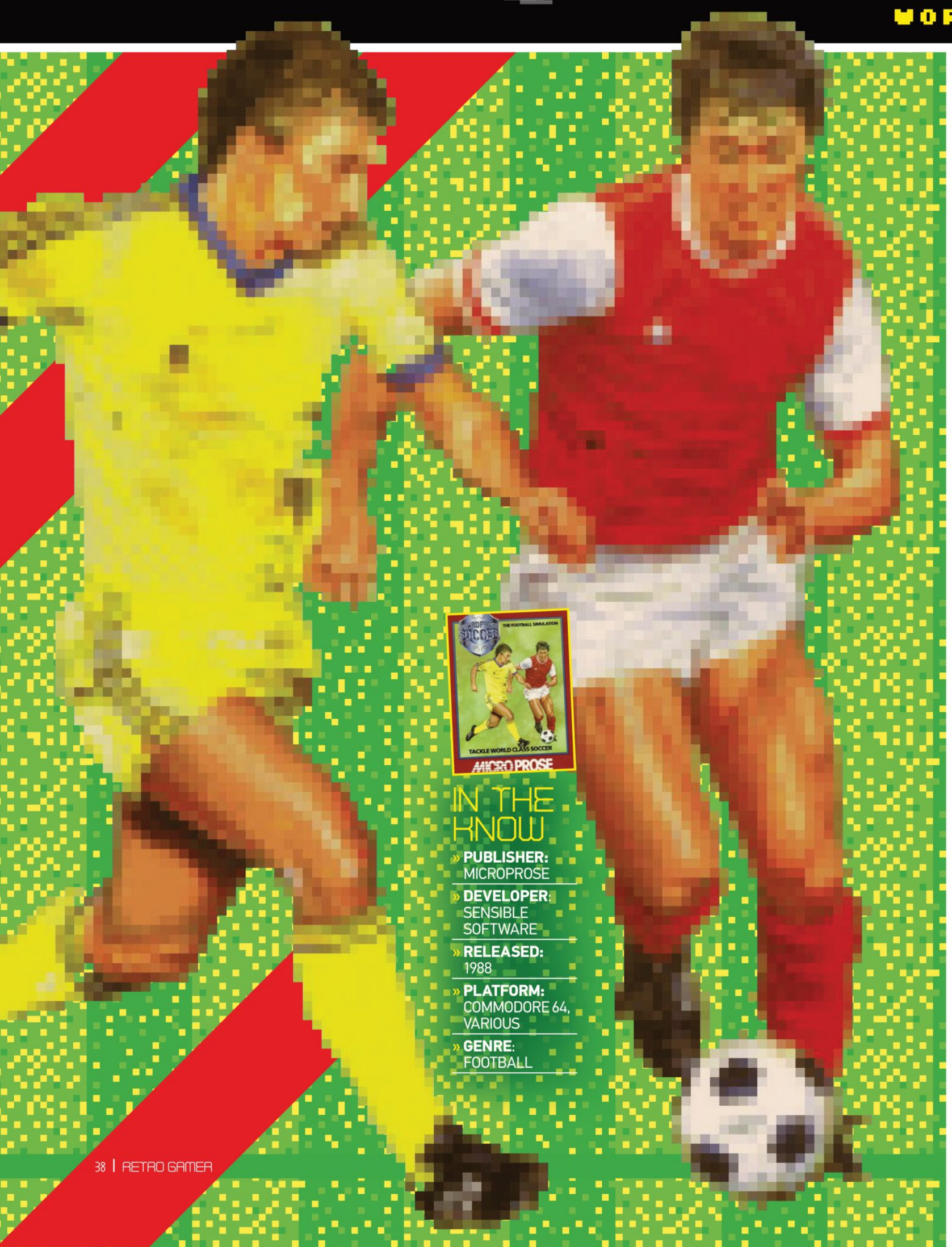
THE MAKING OF

# MICRO PROSE SOCCER

WORDS BY DAVID CROOKES






## IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** MICROPROSE
- **DEVELOPER:** SENSIBLE SOFTWARE
- **RELEASED:** 1988
- **PLATFORM:** COMMODORE 64, VARIOUS
- **GENRE:** FOOTBALL

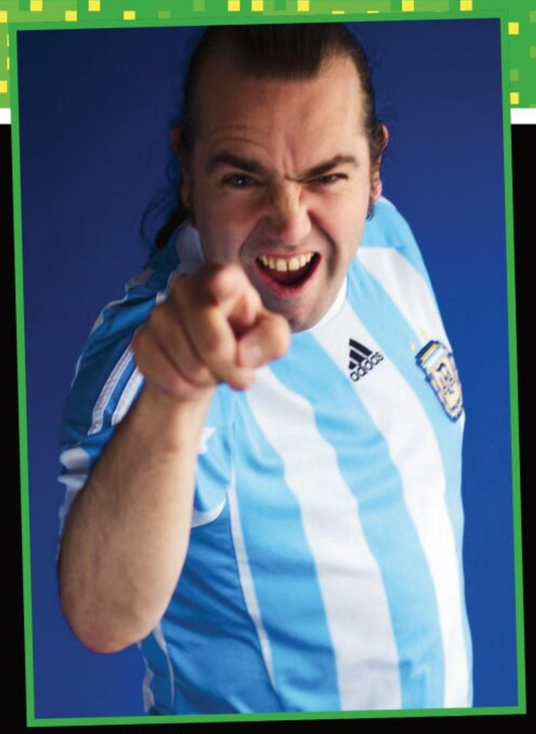
**SENSIBLE SOFTWARE KICKED OFF ITS FOOTBALL VIDEOGAME CAREER IN STYLE WITH A CLASSIC SOCCER GAME THAT THRILLED COME RAIN OR SHINE. JON HARE TALKS TO RETRO GAMER ABOUT HIS SMALL TEAM'S GOAL WHEN DEVELOPING THIS PRECURSOR TO ONE OF THE GREATEST FOOTBALL GAMES OF ALL TIME**

**As football videogames go, there is no doubt *Sensible Soccer* is up there with the best**. It made its stunning debut in 1992, paved the way for *Sensible World Of Soccer* two years later and often tops polls as the finest rendition of the Beautiful Game to ever grace our screens.

But before *Sensible Soccer* kicked its way into the premier league of videogames, its developers Jon Hare and Chris Yates worked on another football title: *Sensible Soccer*. And no, that's not a mistake. For what became known as *MicroProse Soccer* in 1988 was also once set to bear the name of its maker Sensible Software – until an offer rolled in that simply couldn't be refused!

"We were in the process of creating our first football game and we were touting it around a number of publishers," explains Sensible Software cofounder Jon Hare. "We'd approached companies we were working with at the time like Palace and BT – swerving Ocean because we hadn't got a lot of money from them for *Wizball* and *Parallax* – and MicroProse ended up bidding for it." As part of the deal, the publisher wanted to change the name. "They were giving us an advance of £30,000 which was quite a lot for us at the time so we allowed it," Jon says. "To put that into some perspective, Palace Software had offered about £17,000 for *Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit* so, yes, we went with MicroProse for the money. It was quite a jump for us."

Jon and Chris had been creating something rather special: a fast-moving kickabout with great animation and a little dollop of humour for good measure. It was also a little different to many other home computer football games at the time, primarily



» Prior to the 1990 World Cup, Jon Hare ran a simulation using *MicroProse Soccer* and Cameroon won the tournament… twice. "I placed a £100 bet on them to win it for real at 100-1 and they got to the Quarter Finals against England. I was not supporting England in that match!" (England won 3-2).

**"WE WERE DIRECTLY INSPIRED BY TEHKAN WORLD CUP"**
**JON HARE**

» [C64] Both indoor and outdoor games had a replay option although the former was immune to the weather for obvious reasons.

## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**WIZBALL**
**SYSTEM:** COMMODORE 64, VARIOUS
**YEAR:** 1987

**CANNON FODDER**
**SYSTEM:** COMMODORE AMIGA, VARIOUS
**YEAR:** 1993

**SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER (PICTURED)**
**SYSTEM:** AMIGA, DOS
**YEAR:** 1994

» [C64] What's this? Quarters? The six-a-side indoor game was created to appeal to American gamers.

» [C64] You could have a match length of up to 12 minutes and toggle various options such as rain and the power of the banana shot.

because it was played from a top-down perspective rather than side-to-side as was the norm.

That's not to say a bird's-eye perspective had never been tried before. "We were directly inspired by *Tehkan World Cup*," Jon admits, of a Japanese arcade game from 1985 that was most commonly played on a table cabinet with a top-down view of the pitch and players. "It had this trackball as a controller which would seriously damage your knuckles playing it. You had to hit it quite hard to move the guys around the pitch but Chris and I loved it."

The game stuck in the back of their minds until, following development of *Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit* and *Oh No!*, they were able to finally get cracking on a football title of their own. "We liked *Tehkan World Cup*'s top-down view, the size of its sprites and the speed so we decided to base our game on that," Jon says. "In fact, the whole view and feel for *MicroProse Soccer* came from *Tehkan World Cup*, although we added our own innovations and interpretations too."

As with all of the other Sensible Software games at that time, there wasn't a huge amount of preplanning. The basics were laid down, naturally for the most part, "You can't be really imaginative when you're emulating something from the real world; you're limited to your subject matter to a degree," Jon argues – and the rest effectively was produced on the fly.

"Our games would grow organically as we were creating them," Jon says. "Chris was a programming genius and he would chuck stuff into a game that would look great. That said, some of it was premeditated such as the structure of the competitions, international teams and things like that. But yeah, it was football. And football is clearly defined."

» [C64] No, it's not a glitch but *MicroProse Soccer*'s cool VHS-style rewind visual during an action replay.

**Some of the things Chris chucked in were rather defining.** "One of the innovations of the game was ball-bending – we were the first to do a ball-bend on a home computer and that was taken from *Tehkan World Cup*," Jon says. For this, players would need to kick the ball and then move the joystick in a left or right diagonal, creating a banana shot that would curve to a far greater degree than would happen in real life. This was in addition to the usual chips and volleys but the developers didn't realise that their inspiration was accidental.

"It's interesting," Jon explains. "There was ball-bending in *Tehkan World Cup* but I subsequently read that it was actually a bug and it was supposed to be straight. It was unintentional bending. But we kind of exaggerated it. I mean there are very wild banana shots in *MicroProse Soccer* and they weren't refined like they are in *Sensible Soccer* so you had these ridiculous boomerang shots. But that was an innovation."

As a nice touch, the power of the banana shots could be adjusted in the control panel where it was also possible to turn weather effects on and off. "*MicroProse Soccer* is known for having rain," says Jon. But this wasn't purely for show. It created an additional sense of realism – to a degree anyway – given that many games tend not to be played on perfect pitches in the glorious sunshine. "We could have players sliding on the wet pitch," Jon says of the addition, and it was funny to see players slip when making a soggy tackle only to see the ball rolling further away.

Unfortunately, it wasn't possible to rewind those moments but goals could certainly be re-relished. "We added the concept of video replay and it had those black and white fuzzy white noise bands that you get on a VHS rewind," Jon says. "We also had a flashing R in the corner for replays and, again, I don't think people had done that before. What's interesting there is that the rewind was just Chris messing around one day. I went to his house, saw what he had done and thought, 'That's really good.'"

Not that Jon didn't add any sparks of his own. As a graphics artist, his job was to oversee the entire look of the game and, working on the Commodore 64 – the main focus of Sensible Software at the time – he ensured the game would stand out and appeal to a wide number of gamers.

"On the Commodore 64, you could have two sorts of sprites: the thick, chunky ones with four colours which were the ones that most of us used, or two-colour smaller pixel ones, like dottier pixels that would give you more defined graphics," Jon says. "In *MicroProse Soccer*, we used the thin sprites and an outline so you had the colour of the players face, hair, shirt, shorts and socks outlined with black which gave it a cartoon look." Players could identify the footballer they were controlling

» [C64] Whether playing indoor or outdoor soccer, the game let you play tournaments and two-player friendlies.

» [C64] There may not have been any official outdoor soccer licences but you could add your own team names.

» [C64] The indoor game was much harder and faster than the outdoor one, making for end-to-end play.

by looking for the one that was flickering. They could also control the goalkeeper, becoming alerted to the fact by the sound of a buzzer. The controls felt sufficiently complex and depended on what was happening on the pitch – whether the ball was in free play or which team had possession. But what was interesting was the addition of an indoor six-a-side game separate from the usual outdoor eleven-a-side. This was added on the request of MicroProse and it created a two-for-one title in many respects.

As a US company, MicroProse wanted to maximise the revenues of the game Stateside and, at the time, America's biggest football competition was the Major Indoor Soccer League. Matches were hugely popular, sometimes attracting larger crowds than many games in the Football League's First Division – England's top flight pre-Premier League – and MicroProse reckoned US fans were more likely to buy into a soccer videogame if this version of football was incorporated.

"These six-a-side games were huge and MicroProse wanted to include them," says Jon. "So we had American teams in *MicroProse Soccer* and a whole extra six-a-side game, yet it was still a weird market for us to sell into. Soccer games just don't fly in the States because the other sports are so dominant but MicroProse couldn't be faulted for trying."

» [C64] A terrible performance. We're blaming the goalkeeper for this!

> "BY FLUKE, I'VE HAD A NUMBER ONE FOOTBALL GAME IN EVERY DECADE SINCE THE EIGHTIES"
> JON HARE

**To make the game more attractive in the US market, MicroProse gave it a different name, calling it *Keith Van Eron's Pro Soccer* after an American championship-winning goalkeeper who was playing indoor football for Baltimore Blast at the time.** Having to create a six-a-side version of *MicroProse Soccer* put added pressure on the small Sensible Software team but they pulled it off admirably, squeezing development in between stressful life events such as moving home.

"We finished the game in our office in March in Cambridgeshire above a florist called The Green House having begun development in London," says Jon. "Martin Galway had also joined us at this time. He did a lot of the music for *MicroProse Soccer* and he joined as a full partner."

Martin was an important addition. His move to Sensible Software was announced in issue 40 of *Zzap!64* dated August 1988 and it came on the back of an already flourishing career which had seen the renowned music programmer working on themes from *Arkanoid*, *Miami Vice* and *Game Over* as well as *Parallax* and *Wizball* for Sensible Software, on a freelance basis.

The music he produced for *MicroProse Soccer* was superb, even though some of it was dropped from the final version (it would emerge years later courtesy of the wonderful Games That Weren't website). It all added up to an amazing (if not expensive) package that sold and reviewed well, soon reaching the top of the C64 charts before being ported to other home computers too, both 8-bit and 16-bit.

Given such success, it's perhaps surprising that it never got an immediate sequel. Instead, Sensible Software became sidetracked with other games such as *International 3D Tennis*, *Insects In Space*, *Mega-Lo-Mania* and *Wizkid*. But *MicroProse Soccer* was never far from Jon's mind. "When the game came out, *C&VG* hailed it the best sports game on any computer ever and it was quite a splash," Jon says, proudly. He was always going to have another bash at a soccer game eventually.

For the next football title, he took inspiration from the small sprites of *Mega-Lo-Mania*, figuring it would let players see even more of the pitch. Rather than go back to MicroProse, however, Sensible decided to see which other publishers would be interested. One of them was Virgin but it wanted to change the name of the game too!

"This time, we said, 'No way, we've already done that once with MicroProse,' and that's why we signed with Renegade instead," says Jon. And so it was that a football game called *Sensible Soccer* was finally released and it retained the top-down view of *MicroProse Soccer*, albeit at a slight angle.

"Personally, I like to play side-to-side games as well now," explains Jon, who also prefers to sit on the half-way line at Carrow Road, home of

# CONVERSION CAPERS

## COMMODORE 64

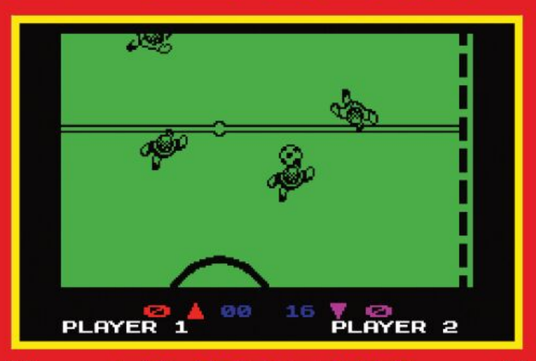
The original and undoubtedly the best of all of the *MicroProse Soccer* versions. It's the one that Jon Hare, Chris Yates and Martin Galway lavished all of their attention on, leaving other developers to port it. Fast, fluid, packed with innovative features and with the indoor and outdoor options, it broke ground.

## AMIGA

Ported by Electronic Pencil, the graphics on the Amiga version, while pleasant enough, moved at a sluggish pace and it ruined any sense of fluid end-to-end action. It didn't help that the scrolling was jerky nor that it was really hard to foul the opposition, prompting many to favour *Kick Off*.

## AMSTRAD CPC

This conversion by Smart Egg Software dropped the league and cup options on the 464 and 664, retaining them only for the 128K 6128. It also sucked most of the colour out of the game since everything was green, making it hard to work out who was on your team.




## ZX SPECTRUM

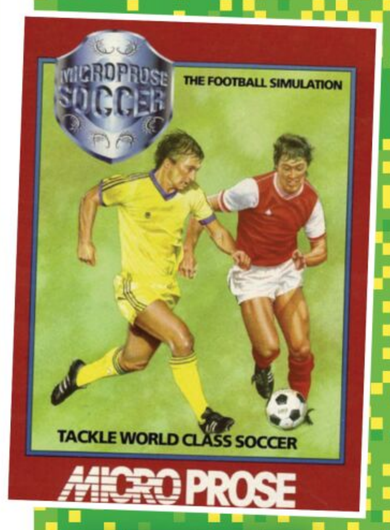
Released six months after the C64 debut, this version was given 90% in *Crash* magazine. Yet, like the CPC version, it too was monochrome and had missing features. Its eight-way scrolling was also jerky and the playing area felt small. But for arcade fun, it was still a good result.

» [C64] The Commodore 64 version was the only one the Sensible Software team worked directly on.

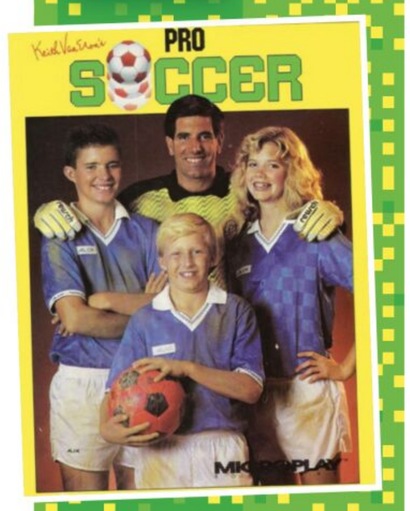
his beloved Norwich City. "But I have a view that playing up and down is more how you visualise football as a player. It gives you more of a player mentality because you're thinking of attacking the goal in front of you and defending the goal behind you. Side-to-side feels more like watching TV or sitting in the crowd although the graphics do tend to look better so there is an advantage to both."

From that moment on, Sensible Software (and Jon) became synonymous with football games. "By fluke, I've had a number one football game in every decade since the Eighties," Jon says. *MicroProse Soccer* was first, then *Sensible Soccer* and *SWOS* took the top slot in the Nineties followed by a mobile version of *Sensible Soccer* which topped the charts in the Noughties. "In the very, very last few weeks of the Tens, *Sociable Soccer* got to number one in the Apple Arcade charts," says Jon. "It was only for a week but that was enough for me," Jon says.

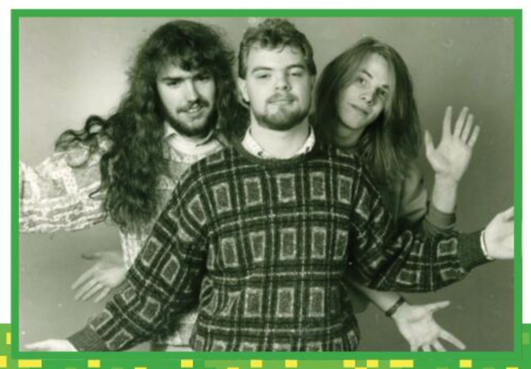
Yet despite the huge success with *Sensible Soccer*, he is keen for *MicroProse Soccer* to be remembered too. "*Sensible Soccer* was the game which made our name as a company despite the success of the other titles," he says. "But, for me, *MicroProse Soccer* was the start of my continuing legacy of football games. It's the one that got the ball rolling and it'll always be important to me." ✱




» As well as the original big box (complete with manual and a history of football and the World Cup), the game was also re-released on the budget label Kixx. *MicroProse Soccer* was called *Keith Van Eron's Pro Soccer* in the US.




» Jon Hare wrote a tune to promote *MicroProse Soccer* at the European Computer Trade Show in 1988. You can hear it at bit.ly/3ksaKHP being performed by Jon and acclaimed videogame musician Ben Daglish.



# ALL THE SKILLS!

## SIX TIPS TO TOP THE LEAGUE

### PASS QUICKLY

When one of your footballers has the ball, be wary of keeping hold of it for a prolonged period of time. Doing so increases the risk of you being tackled so look for other footballers on your team and quickly get the ball to them.

### PRACTICE CURVES AND CORNERS

You're more likely to score if you're pretty adept at the curve shots, pushing diagonally on the controller after the ball leaves your foot to get around defenders and beat the goalkeeper. But pay attention at corners too: a good whipped-in ball often ends in triumph.

### TRY A CHIP

Faced by some oncoming players, you could look to chip the ball over their heads and dart straight through, putting you in a position to retrieve the ball on the other side. That way you can enjoy a less-impeded run on goal and hopefully score.

### BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM

If you are attempting to banana kick the ball, it's always a good idea to bend it away from the goalkeeper rather than towards him. Give it a go and you'll find that you're much more likely to hit the back of the net.

### BE PATIENT

When the opposition have blasted wide and you're ready to take that goal kick, don't immediately smack the ball. Wait until all of the other players on your team are back up the field and are ready to get on the end of it.

### USE THE WALL

The indoor game is a trickier, faster beast than the outdoor one and few players will become world champion without a lot of perseverance. Make good use of the walls to help you bag the goals and watch out for rebounds from the goalie.

## WHICH TO CHEER AND WHICH TO JEER

### DOS

Designer Software's conversion of the game has been released on Steam so it's likely to be the port that many readers will be playing right now. Although it falls short of the excellent original, it manages to retain its playability while boasting a large view of the pitch and smooth play.

### ATARI ST

Like the Amiga conversion, this was best left on the bench. While recognisably a game of football, it loses a lot of the charm of the C64 original and that was a big issue: the conversions let the side down – perhaps why *MicroProse Soccer* doesn't always gain the attention it deserves.

# Super Mario Bros 3

## MISSING MARIO

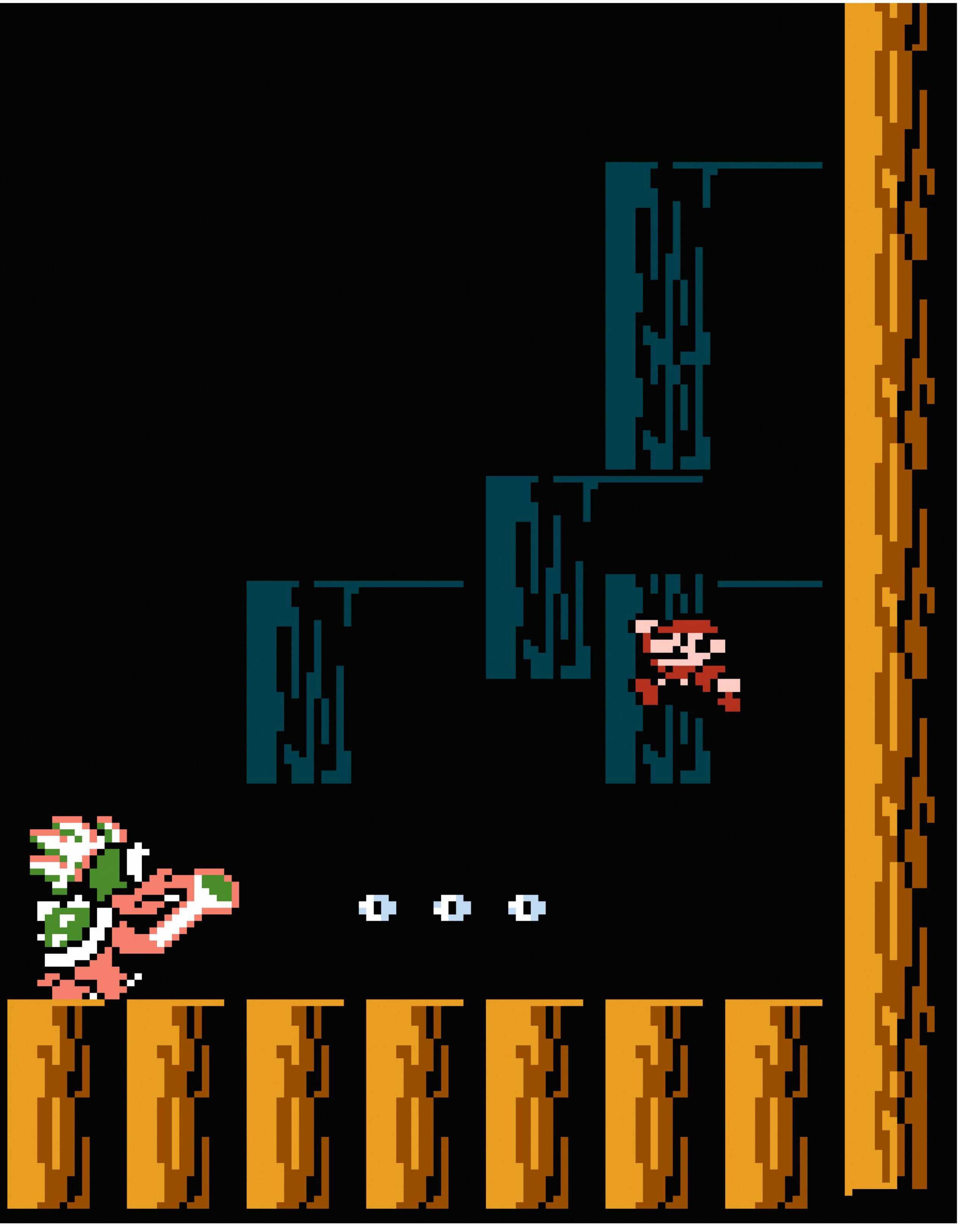
» NES » 1988 » NINTENDO

**As a reader of Retro Gamer, you probably don't need anybody to tell you how good *Super Mario Bros 3* is.** Decades after it was released, the level designs are still engaging, the graphical simplicity does nothing to diminish the game's excellent character designs, and the music can stay lodged in your head for weeks at a time.

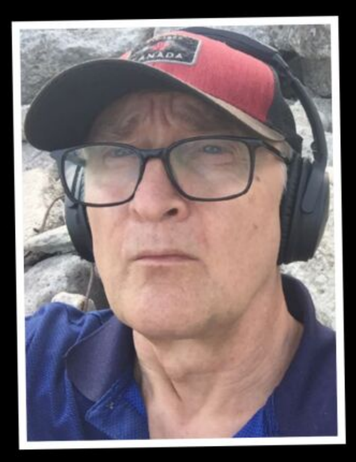
Back in 2003, I really did need someone to tell me how good *Super Mario Bros 3* was. I'd chosen the GameCube after the demise of the Dreamcast and *Super Mario Sunshine* had made me more interested in the plumber's past adventures, but being a Sega kid I didn't have much classic Nintendo knowledge. The last time I'd assumed that *Mario* games were universally good, I ended up buying *Mario Is Missing*. [Lol - Ed] Fortunately, I now had the internet and was clued in by an American writer – I think it was someone from Insert Credit, but the years have dulled that memory.

Fortunately, I knew where to look for it. Money-Go-Round was a local second-hand store that was the best in town for less popular consoles – they had plenty of NES games, Saturn games, even 32X games. If I had a time machine and a bunch of money, I would have a field day in there. Sure enough, they had *Super Mario Bros 3*, and even a few copies of it! Sadly I was not a wealthy time traveller, but a broke teenager, and my mum convinced me that with a few copies in stock, it'd still be there when I did have the money. So of course, the shop closed soon after.

This little saga was one of the first times I'd ever sought out a specific game for an old console, and I learned not to pass up opportunities so easily in future. The irony of it all is that a few years later, I did get hold of the game – but at the same time I got a SNES with *Super Mario All-Stars*, and I ended up playing that version far more than the original NES game, just because the hardware was more reliable. ✱

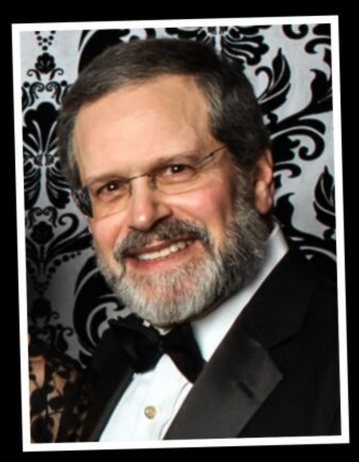


# THE EVOLUTION OF BOULDER DASH™



» *Boulder Dash* creator Peter Liepa designed caves for the latest follow-ups to his game.

» BBE Entertainment's Stephan Berendsen is continuing the *Boulder Dash* series with *Boulder Dash Deluxe*.



» First Star founder Richard Spitalny oversaw all but the most recent *Boulder Dash* titles.

**After wowing Atari 8-bit gamers in the mid-Eighties, First Star's Boulder Dash went on to receive a number of follow-ups. Creator Peter Liepa, First Star's Richard Spitalny and IP owner Stephan Berendsen explain how the series evolved**

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

**Not all videogames begin as entirely fresh ideas.** In fact, many take inspiration from existing concepts and then gradually evolve into something new. Take *Boulder Dash*, for example, which resembled a little known arcade game until Peter Liepa took over from its original developer Chris Gray. "Chris worked on a sort of a clone of a game called *The Pit*, which he wrote in BASIC," Peter remembers, "and a local publishing house, In-home Software, was interested in it. It brought Chris and I together with the intent that I would help him commercialise it, but that intention evaporated very quickly as I realised that the rocks always rolled the same way each time you played it – because they were pre-programmed."

Instead of converting Chris Gray's game into assembly language, Peter transferred its core mechanics into a new project with gravity-affected boulders rather than on-rail rocks. "I basically started from scratch with a very simple simulation of physics. That was the backbone of the game," Peter notes. "There was a mathematical concept called cellular automaton, where the idea was that cells changed state according to the cells around them. So I took that general idea and wrote rules for the rocks and gravity. It was like a black world, where everything was in a position on a grid. The rocks were just the letter O, and the dirt was probably just solid squares."

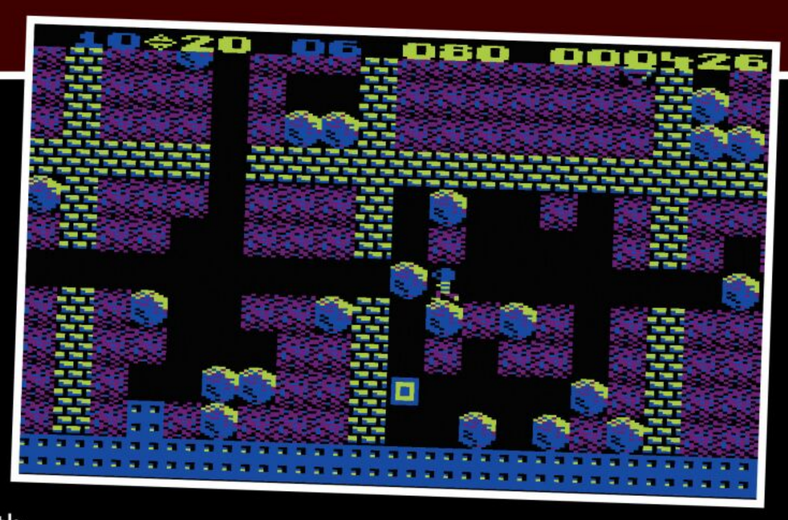
Initially, *Boulder Dash* lacked level designs and an objective – other than surviving, but its subterranean setting soon gave purpose to the game's hostile environments. "Rather than design caves, I just had a random number generator that threw out rocks and dirt and space at random," Peter explains, "and maybe in some cases I'd supplement that. Of course there also had to be motivation, so the jewels came in as a scoring mechanism, and then I had tangible goals: to pick up jewels and find the exit."

> "When I started adding enemies there were pursuits and flight – basically there were primal emotions that corresponded to the mathematical stuff on the screen"
>
> PETER LIEPA

Other aspects of *Boulder Dash*'s initial design underwent changes too, such as its diminutive protagonist and the static caves he found himself in. "I had this little eight-by-eight pixel stick figure character – like the little guys in *Choplifter*," Peter recollects. "But a fellow at In-home said he should be bigger and more recognisable. The character I designed was a bug-like rodent with a striped shirt, I guess. Then the Atari made implementing scrolling fairly easy, because it was built for that sort of thing."

» [Atari 8-bit] Essentially a mobile obstacle, amoebas turn into jewels if you stop them growing.

» [Atari 8-bit] A lot of the fun in *Boulder Dash* stems from avoiding its deadly and unpredictable rocks.



» [Atari 8-bit] Crushing fireflies with rocks in *Boulder Dash* causes explosions that can blow holes in walls.

As well as changing *Boulder Dash*'s fixed-screen caves into scrolling ones and giving its player character a makeover, Peter also gave his hero a trio of opponents. "The amoebas probably came from the game of Go, where you surround your enemy," Peter considers. "I probably thought it would be an interesting challenge to wall off an area with rocks. Then the butterflies and the fireflies were kind of the same, except that the fireflies exploded and destroyed things, and the butterflies exploded and made jewels."

***Boulder Dash*'s butterflies hadn't always turned into gems on their demise, however.** In fact, the airborne enemies had originally tapped into native survival instincts. "When I started adding enemies there were pursuits and flight – basically there were primal emotions that corresponded to the mathematical stuff on the screen," Peter points out. "But maybe I wanted to give an extra reward for killing the butterflies, by having them make jewels. So it became less about the satisfaction of killing and more just the way that you got jewels, which was a little less cold-blooded."

As well as enemies, obstructive walls were added to *Boulder Dash* to encourage exploration, some of which let rocks fall through them that then became precious stones. "You had to explore to find the enchanted walls, and then activate them," Peter observes. "That was the only way you would find them, because they otherwise looked identical to normal walls. Part of the puzzle was that you had to excavate below them, because if you didn't you just lost whatever you dropped through them." As *Boulder Dash*'s development became less about creating elements and more about using them in cave designs, Peter set puzzles based on strategic path digging. "I would have noticed that one way of dealing with the enemies, and even harnessing them, was to dig diversions that they would follow," Peter contemplates. "So maybe I did that, and then realised I could build a whole series of lairs for them. You would then have to lead them off somewhere, and figure out a way to dig paths while not getting killed by making everything too chaotic."

Once its caves were complete, Peter offered *Boulder Dash* to First Star Software rather than his local publisher In-house, as First Star founder Richard Spitalny recalls. "We got a submission from Peter, which I opened," Richard enthuses. "I started playing it, and I was hooked. Once we were partners on it we started giving him some feedback, like introducing more colour schemes and alternating between them. We also talked about being able to start at every fifth cave, and putting in static, non-scrolling puzzle screens, which turned into intermissions."

With the tweaks suggested by First Star in place, *Boulder Dash* was released to

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

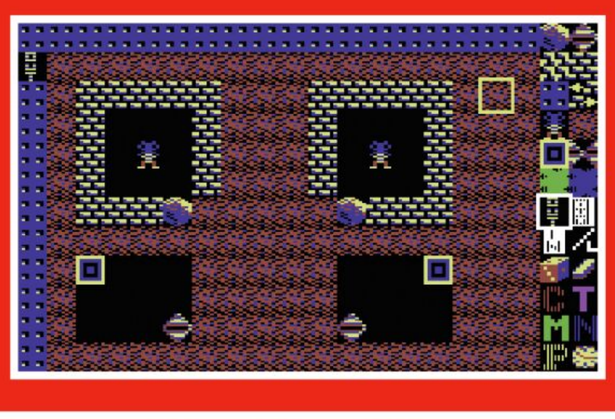
## ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

RICHARD SPITALNY DISCUSSES THE BOULDER DASH CONSTRUCTION KIT

**Why did you release a *Boulder Dash* title based on designing caves?**
We thought that we would get the kind of sales that we had gotten on *Boulder Dash* and *Boulder Dash II* by doing a construction kit, and that people would love that. Fernando Herrera – one of the founders of the company – headed that up. It was what we thought would be the best way to get one more bite of the cherry, and then move on with other things. It should have been the end of the series.

**What made you decide to include new pre-designed levels with the construction kit?**
We were trying to provide value, and we wanted the best of both worlds. So if you wanted another *Boulder Dash* here it was – 15 new caves. But by the way, you could also make your own. So you could do both or either. It was the fourth one in the series, so we tried to make it appealing by having a full game with an editor added on.

**Why did the kit have left-field options such as static, defenceless Rockfords?**
Fernando was trying to make the editor as robust as possible, and every game element was a selectable sprite. So as you had a Rockford sprite then why not allow some that didn't move? The thinking was in the context of this probably being the last *Boulder Dash* that we were going to do, so we gave the player everything that we could.



STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

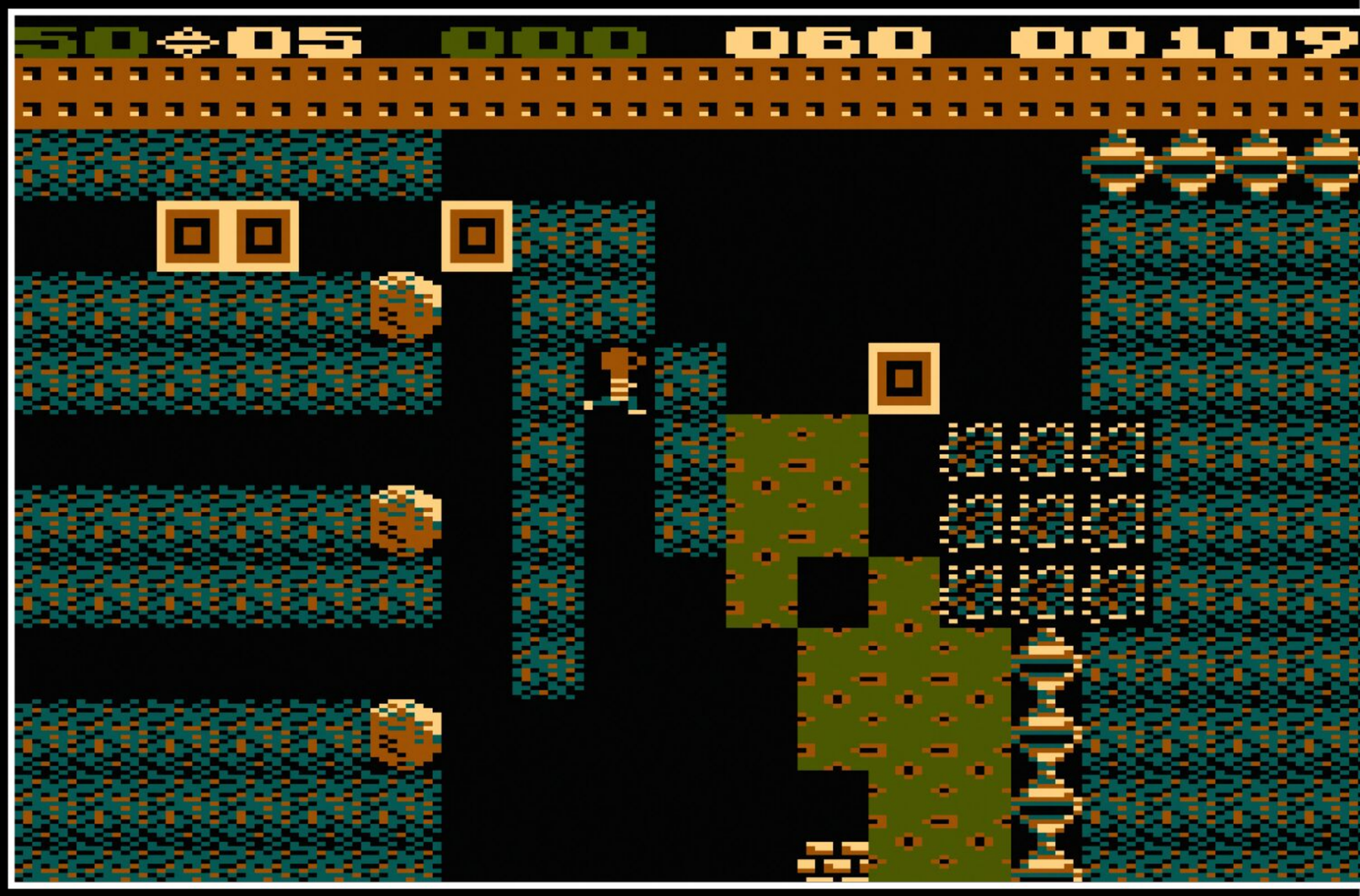
# Arcade Action

## FIRST STAR FOUNDER RICHARD SPITALNY RECALLS THE BOULDER DASH COIN-OPS

**What was the story behind the UK *Boulder Dash* coin-op *Rockford*?**
*Rockford* was done with Arcadia Systems, which was part of Mastertronic. Fernando Herrera designed it with Peter Liepa involved to a certain degree. As well as the coin-op, we had a deal with Mastertronic for a whole bunch of home systems – the Amiga, ST and others. My memory is that the various versions of *Rockford* were done concurrently, with Peter and Fernando working on the arcade version.

**Why were players allowed to break free if Rockford got surrounded by rocks in Data East's 1990 coin-op?**
I think the idea of having a 'rescue mode' was just to get people to pay more money. The entire design for the *Boulder Dash* coin-op was entirely different from when you weren't trying to get sequential payments. It was time-based, so being able to escape meant that you could continue to play for longer, and that you would put more money in to get more time.

**Why did Data East split its 1990 *Boulder Dash* coin-op into themed worlds?**
My sense is that Data East needed the eye candy. In the arcades, someone would be looking at a whole bunch of machines side by side. So the *Boulder Dash* coin-op had to look interesting. Also, because there were four worlds, players would think there was more to do and more to see – although that was much more of an *impression* of giving you more than actually doing that.



» [Atari 8-bit] In *Boulder Dash II*, you pit exploding fireflies against an amoeba to get to some jewels.

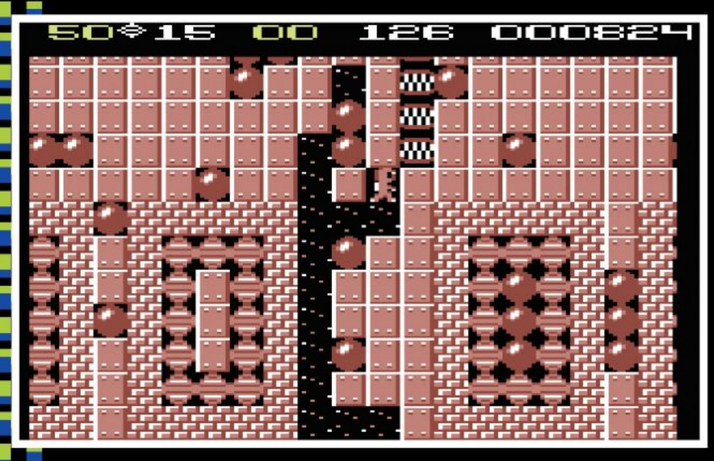
a highly receptive public, and so work on a second game commenced shortly after. "We were following up quickly with a sequel because the market was asking for one," Richard reflects, "but instead of just making new caves we added some new gameplay elements. Each time we added an element there were unexpected consequences that didn't appear until we did extensive testing, so between adding growing walls and slime we thought that was enough."

**The slime in *Boulder Dash II* acted as a barrier, through which jewels could fall through and become unreachable, although Peter Liepa has forgotten it entirely.** "I don't remember the slime," Peter admits, "but I was clearly recycling the amoebas. I kind of remember it was a different colour, and I remember the word 'slime', but I have no recollection of the mechanics. Maybe I was just motivated for another puzzle category, but it wasn't like I was hell-bent on introducing new characters or anything."

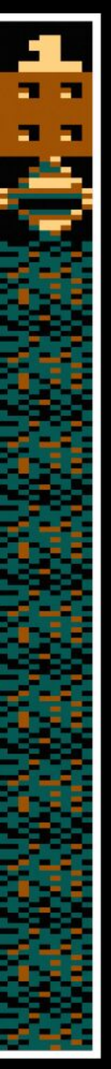
Another new element of *Boulder Dash II* came in the form of a cave design where players pitted fireflies against amoebas, with the aim of clearing a path to some jewels. "If I wanted fireflies and amoebas in the same cave then I had to make a choice about what happened when they made contact," Peter ponders, "and I thought it would be fun if the fireflies exploded. The amoeba was essentially an obstacle, so I based a quest on that. The idea being that you had to blast your way through an amoeba."

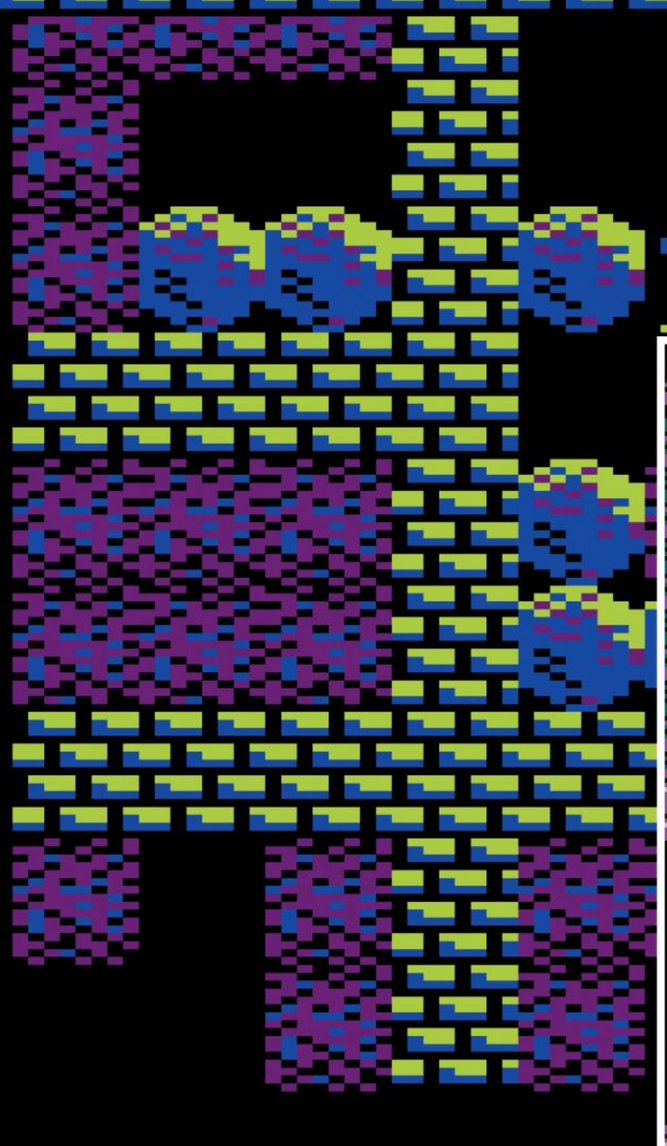
The fresh challenges in the second *Boulder Dash* title went down well with gamers, as did those in *Boulder Dash III*, which was a surprise to First Star's Richard Spitalny. "*Boulder Dash III* came out without our knowledge or permission," Richard reveals. "Its designers just took our IP and added some new graphics and some new caves, which were mostly

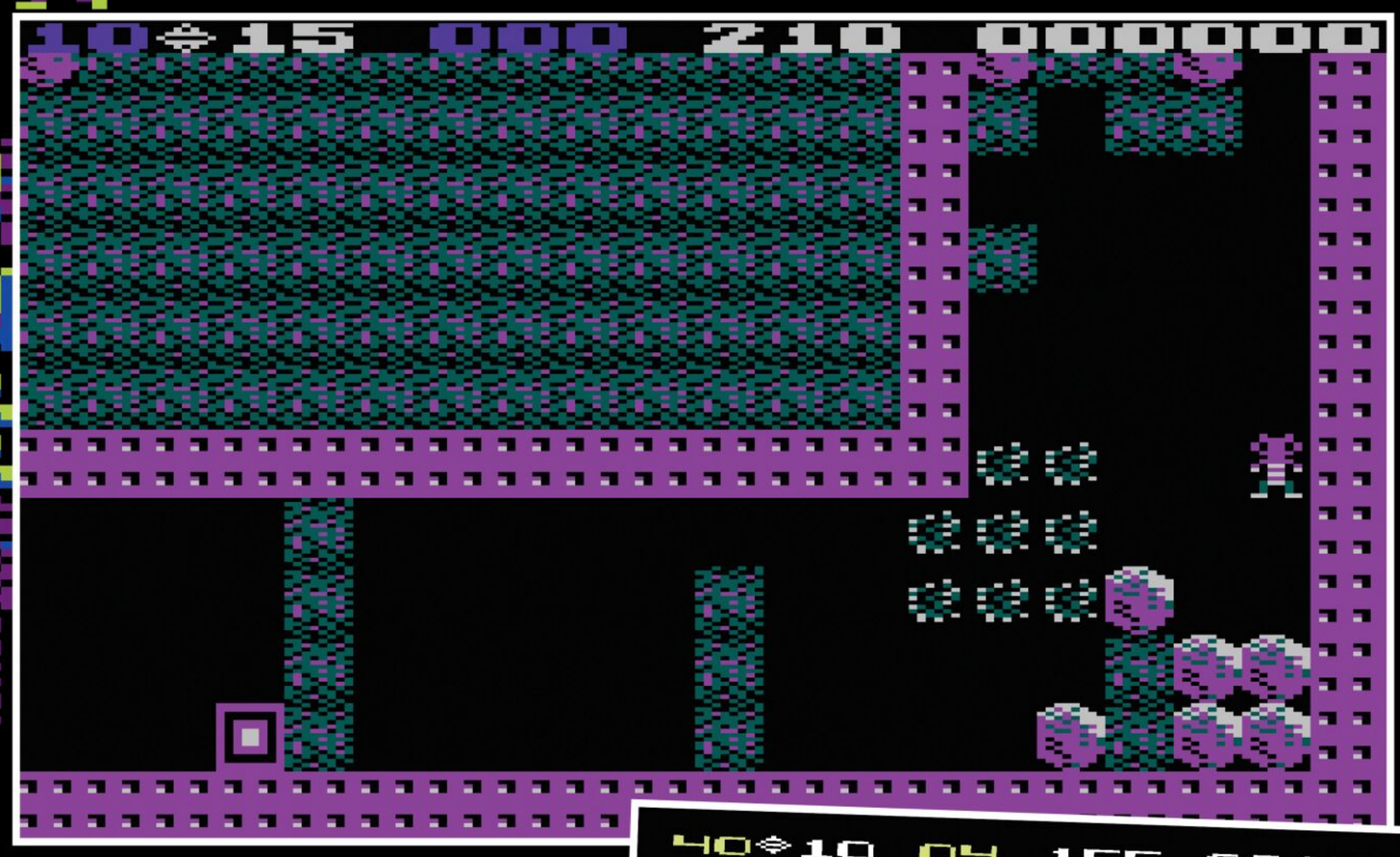
» [Atari 8-bit] The new enemy in *Boulder Dash II* is a slime that jewels fall through and become irretrievable.

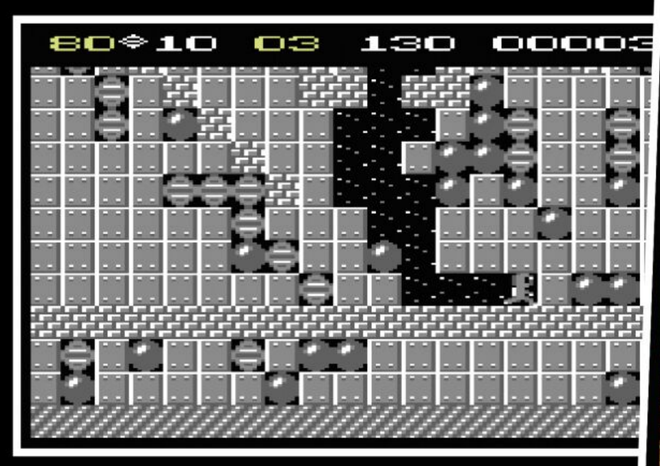


» [C64] Although unique to *Boulder Dash III*, its chattering teeth behave just like the original's fireflies.









"I suggested we make a series of caves for Boulder Dash-XL that were puzzle-centric, for players who didn't have quick reflexes or great hand-eye coordination"

**RICHARD SPITALNY**

in black and white or black and red. So we contacted the publisher and shut it down, but then we worked out a deal where it re-did the packaging and we got royalties."

**The *Boulder Dash* series continued with a cave-design package and two coin-ops, and then ten years later the power-up laden GBA title *Boulder Dash EX* was released.** "I think the rotation power-up was to support the linked play, which was very cool!" Richard enthuses. "It worked really well in terms of the combat when you were playing against another player. Because if you got a rotation power-up, and used it at the right time, then *you* knew you were going to use it but your opponent didn't. You could also play against the AI, but it supported up to four players, which was killer."

Three downloadable *Boulder Dash* games came out in the years after *Boulder Dash EX*, after which *Boulder Dash Rocks!* made good use of the unique hardware of the DS. "One of the modes was called Route Race,'" Richard beams, "where you looked at a cave, analysed what you had to do and then drew it with the stylus. Then you hit play, and what you had worked out would play out on the screen. Then Rockford needed to have oxygen when he was underwater, and I wanted to have boss fights, and all these new ideas were an attempt to take advantage of the platform we were on."

After a short hiatus, the multiplatform release *Boulder Dash-XL* furthered Rockford's adventures, which included a mode without opponents or time limits to worry about. "Over the years, people had said to me that what they really liked was to figure out the solutions to the puzzles," Richard says. "So I suggested we make a series of caves for *Boulder Dash-XL* that were puzzle-centric, for players who didn't have quick reflexes or great hand-eye coordination, but just wanted a mental challenge. That's where the Puzzle Mode came from, and I designed a lot of the caves for that with an editor."

Another of *Boulder Dash-XL*'s innovations gave Richard doubts, more specifically its reimagining of series protagonist Rockford and alternate player character Crystal. "Yeah, that came from the graphic team," Richard discloses. "That was something I struggled with over the years. We felt the little ant creature – or whatever you want to call Rockford – wasn't that conducive to grandfather-ing from decade to decade. So

his robot incarnation in *Boulder Dash-XL* was just another suggestion by a design team – I guess it was poetic licence."

More importantly, *Boulder Dash-XL* delivered on gameplay, as did the next instalment in the series, which Chris Gray produced with help from Richard Spitalny and Peter Liepa. "Chris thought a modern version of *Boulder Dash* would really be something, so he and Richard Spitalny initiated the project," Peter reviews. "I think Chris thought of it as the band getting back together – like a reunion. Anyway, they showed me the prototypes that they had and talked me into it."

» [DS] In *Boulder Dash Rocks!* there are ranged weapons that can also be used to move obstructive rocks.

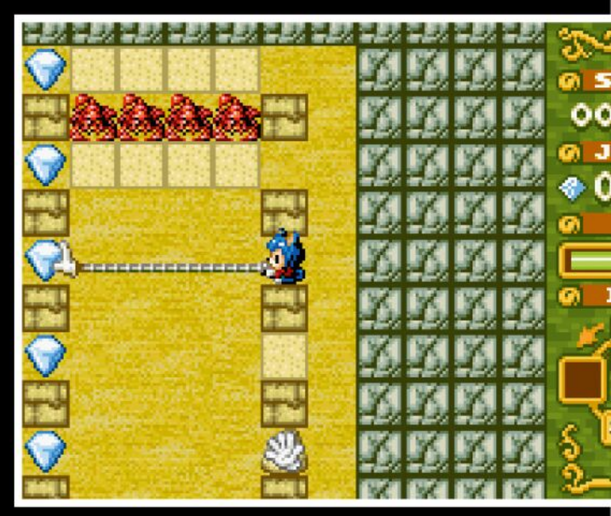
**As the joint project marked a major milestone, *Boulder Dash 30th Anniversary* looked to enhance the franchise's core gameplay, which Peter used to inform his cave designs.** "I agreed to do one of their worlds – so 20 caves. Then I examined the new mechanics, and I tried to build all of my levels around them," Peter details. "All of a sudden there were new horizons to explore, so I'd really push things. Like there was no longer any fixed size for caves – they could be any dimensions. So I ended up with one that was five cells across and maybe 50 cells high, then I had to work out what I could put in that!"

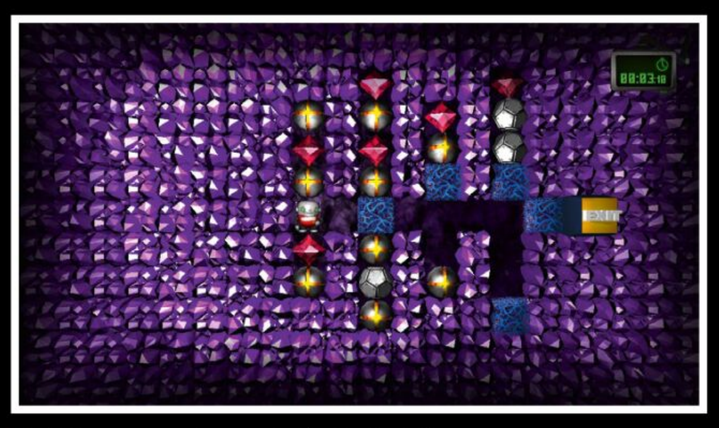
The in-house *Boulder Dash 30th Anniversary* team created unlockable power-ups and heroes for the game, which Richard Spitalny thought should move in eight directions. "One of the things that I asked for was ramps – which gave players the ability to move diagonally," Richard remarks. "Other elements like unlocking power-ups and player characters with different abilities came from Chris. It was initially a mobile title, so there was also a whole lot of treasure chests and gold. Many fans felt those elements took away from the game, but when a game's free to play there are these things that one does."

One aspect of *Boulder Dash 30th Anniversary*'s treasure hunts benefitted its gameplay, in that picking from the protagonists that the gold unlocked was a strategic choice. "Being able to play the same caves but with different skill sets based on the character you chose was different, and it was richer," Richard argues. "The unlockable characters put an emphasis on strategy, because you had to realise which of their abilities would

» [GBA] The 'rotate screen' power-up is just one of *Boulder Dash Ex*'s contributions to the series.

» [DS] The boss fights in *Boulder Dash Rocks!* revolve around moving and dropping boulders.





» [PC] The puzzle mode caves in *Boulder Dash-XL* involve very few elements, but they're far from easy.

» [PC] As well as Rockford, you can play as the female character Crystal in *Boulder Dash-XL*.

fit the caves' challenges." Five years later, BBG Entertainment's *Boulder Dash Deluxe* featured power-ups that players built from parts found in treasure chests, similar to those in its predecessor. "You don't *have* to build power-ups," Richard comments. "It's just that if you want to play the game faster, instead of getting a speed power-up, you might build yourself some roller-skates. I think that's great. I haven't done it yet, but I'm looking forward to doing so – it sounds brilliant."

> "We said we'd do something new with fancy enemies that kids might like. For the older guys we have the retro world – that's for them"
>
> STEPHAN BERENDSEN

**Besides introducing fresh mechanics, *Boulder Dash Deluxe* catered for both fans of the original and younger players, as BBG founder Stephan Berendsen explains.** "Some older fans only want retro stuff, but of course we also want to introduce *Boulder Dash* to new gamers," Stephan acknowledges. "So we said we'd do something new with fancy enemies that kids might like, and they can also design their player character – because younger players like to customise. For the older guys we have the retro world – that's for them."

Another aspect of *Boulder Dash Deluxe* aimed at those that appreciated the first game in the series was Liepa World, which of course took its name from its designer. "It's 20 caves designed by Peter Liepa!" Stephan grins. "They took a while, because he always wants to do things perfectly – he's not a guy who just does a quick job. But we're very happy with them, and he was happy that he could be part of the series again, because it's still his baby."

As the holder of the *Boulder Dash* IP, Stephan is well-placed to chart the future of the popular franchise, and he has some interesting ideas for upcoming projects. "We want to make a multiplayer *Boulder Dash*, because people like to play against each other and with each other," Stephan divulges. "It's going to have more power-ups and new levels. Then also on our list is a VR version, where you're under the earth in caves, which should be an amazing experience."

It seems only fair that *Boulder Dash* creator Peter Liepa has the last word, which he uses to look back at his seminal work decades after it was revealed to the world. "It's great to hear from people who played it as a kid," Peter says proudly. "*Boulder Dash* was something I had complete control over, meaning that it was playing on a fixed platform, and I basically made all of the design decisions. It was designed to be fun, and I think that it holds up, so I'm very happy with it." ✱

» [PC] One of *Boulder Dash 30th Anniversary*'s most striking foes is a dragon that turns into jewels.

» [PC] Instead of butterflies, fireflies and amoebas, *Boulder Dash Deluxe* has new animal opponents such as sharks.

## STAGES OF EVOLUTION: DIGITAL DASHING

### BOULDER DASH PUBLISHER RICHARD SPITALNY ON THE SERIES GOING ONLINE

**What was the thinking behind making a brand-new Christmas *Boulder Dash* with party balloons?**

*Boulder Dash Xmas* was released by a firm called Solware without our permission, and we told it that if it wanted to continue to publish the game then we needed to work out a partnership. The balloons were down to Solware wanting things that floated. It took one of the key elements of *Boulder Dash*, which was boulders falling, and it turned it on its head. So the balloons were an evolution.

**Why was *Boulder Dash Treasure Pleasure* stuffed full of violent power-ups?**

The graphics were cartoon-esque, so it didn't strike me as violent. Also, we had explosions in the original *Boulder Dash*. Adding detonators, bombs and hammers was just us giving the player more abilities and options. To me, there was still a heavy emphasis on strategy, and you still had those moments of not believing you'd done something stupid!

**Why did you decide to add an optional female protagonist to *Boulder Dash Pirate's Quest*?**

I was convinced that if you could play as a female character that there were a lot of women and girls who would want to do that, and as soon as we introduced her you saw so many female players on the online leaderboard! If Rockford and Crystal had different caves to play through it might have defeated what I was going after, which was equality. So it was the same game for both characters.

» PUSHING THE LIMITS

# Aladdin

## The platform game which showed that Disney magic could still be found on a nine-year-old console

» **PLATFORM:** MASTER SYSTEM » **RELEASED:** 1994 » **DEVELOPER:** SIMS

**In the early Nineties, Disney games had built up a good reputation**. Capcom had done great work with them on the Nintendo formats, and Sega had developed the likes of *Castle Of Illusion*, *Quackshot* and *The Lucky Dime Caper*. But when Sega got the licence for *Aladdin*, it decided not to take it on internally, with the Mega Drive version eventually going to Virgin Games and the Master System and Game Gear versions given to SIMS.

Though it may seem strange not to have employed the internal teams that did such a good job on the earlier Disney games, SIMS was a competent Master System developer that occasionally turned out greats like *Master Of Darkness* and *Ninja Gaiden*. However, the pseudonymous main planner Lehto's previous platform game experience was on *Tom & Jerry: The Movie*, a game in which the famous cat and mouse chases took place in semi-automatic scrolling stages. Perhaps as a result, *Aladdin* featured plenty of auto-scrolling chase stages of its own.

The game's most impressive aspect is its graphical quality, with well-drawn sprites, plenty of animation and liberal use of special effects that aren't commonly seen on the Master System. Masaaki Akine, credited as Chaos Brain, and the pseudonymous YamaX provided the game's visual programming, while Johny-Ittetsu, Max-T2 and Hiroyuki Kikkawa were responsible for the main artwork, enemy artwork and *Aladdin*'s artwork respectively. All three received their first Master System credits here, and Kikkawa would go on to work on the likes of *Deep Fear*, *Sega Bass Fishing* and *Sonic Shuffle*.

This version of *Aladdin* isn't in the same league as either Virgin or Capcom's versions, as it's quite a simple game and rather easy with it, but at first glance you could be forgiven for thinking it was running on something a bit beefier than Sega's aged 8-bit console. If you want to try *Aladdin* for yourself, its popularity means that it's in greater supply than most late era Master System games, and you can find it starting at about £10. The very similar Game Gear version is also rather common, particularly in North America, though you'll likely need to pay a premium price for a complete copy due to its more disposable cardboard box. *

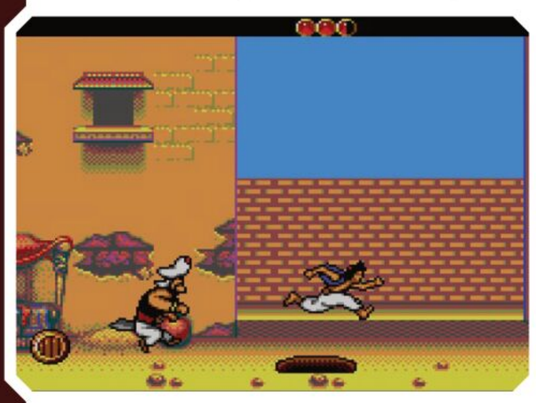
# HOW IT PUSHED THE LIMITS...

## Impressive Intro

While it can't quite be full screen, hence the giant Genie frame, the game's intro features some impressive-looking art that conveys the early part of the story for those few players that were unfamiliar with the film.

## Playing With Perspective

The most striking thing you'll see is heavy use of line scrolling effects, with 3D-looking buildings to give a greater sense of perspective, and plenty of parallax-scrolling effects in both the foreground and background.



## Layered Levels

A more subtle trick evident from the first stage is the use of a brick wall that scrolls at a different rate to everything else on the screen. This looks like a second background layer – something the Master System couldn't do.

## Amazing Animation

While this game didn't have direct access to Disney art like Virgin's Mega Drive version, *Aladdin* is very well animated with plenty of different moves, including jumping, climbing, sliding, careful steps and many more.

# Minority Report

## INTERESTING GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED

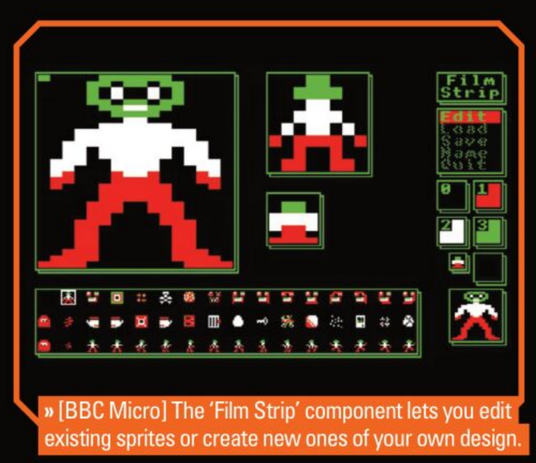
Image by Dejdzer / Digga

## BBC MASTER

**Launched in 1986, the BBC Master beefed up the spec of the ageing Model B, increasing the memory to 128K. This allowed for bigger games, but were they better? And are there any lost gems to be discovered?**

**WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL**

» [BBC Micro] The classic *Repton 3* returns, only with a bunch of new screens to test your caving credentials.



» [BBC Micro] The 'Film Strip' component lets you edit existing sprites or create new ones of your own design.

## REPTON INFINITY

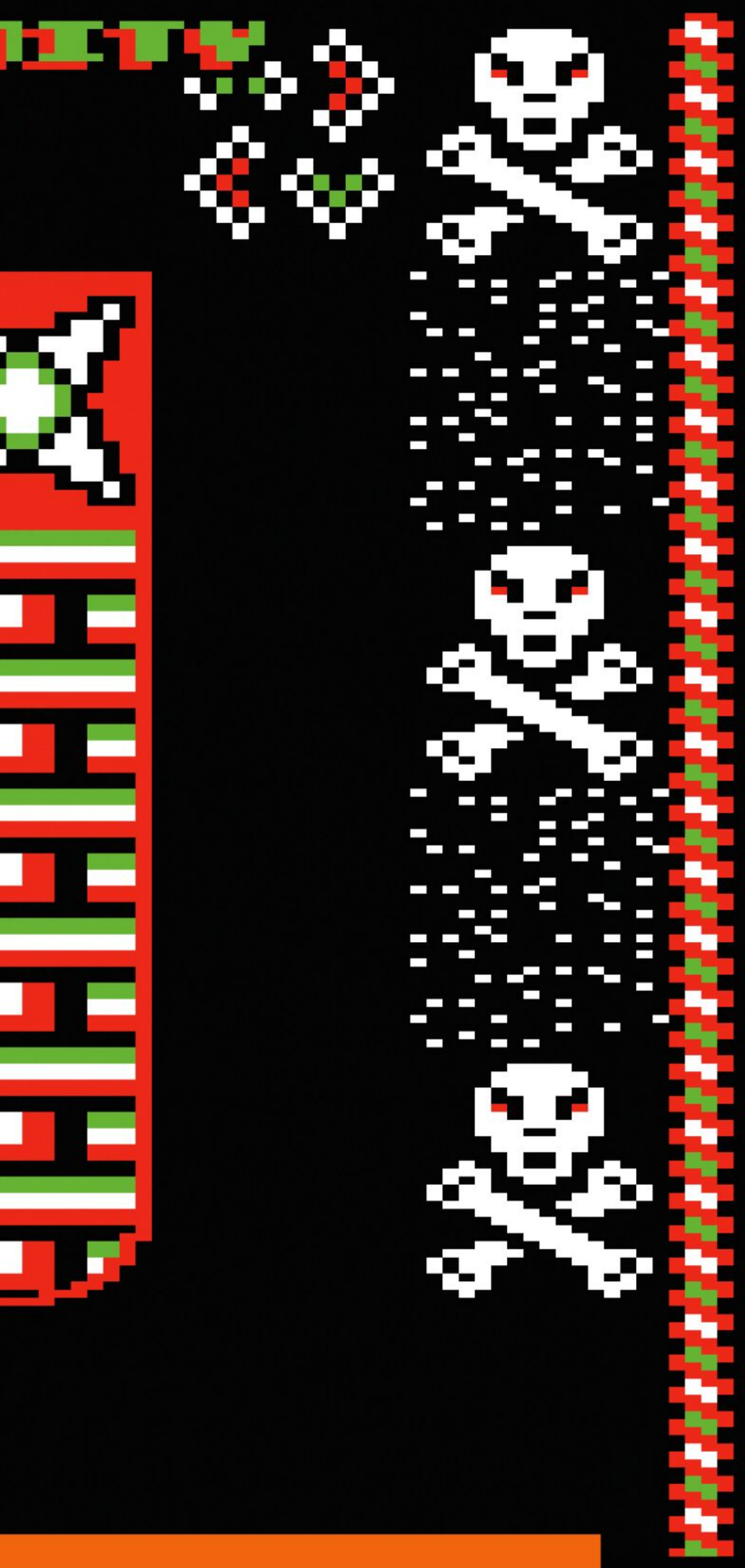
■ DEVELOPER: **SUPERIOR** ■ YEAR: **1988**

■ ***Repton* was the most successful game series to appear on Acorn machines, with combined sales of more than 125,000.** Or so Superior claimed, but it sounds genuine, as every BBC Micro or Electron user under the sun surely owned at least one *Repton* game, right? So the question was: with *Repton Infinity* being the fourth mainline entry, and the seventh overall, did we really need another? Especially as *Repton 3* included a screen editor, so fans could create their own levels ad infinitum.

Happily, *Repton Infinity* wasn't just another *Repton* game – it was actually a broad game-creation tool. You could still design your own screens, as in *Repton 3*, but you could now use the built-in scripting language, REPTOL, to determine the rules and logic, and effectively create your own games. According to the authors David Lawrence and David Acton, it was possible to create versions of *Pac-Man*, *Frogger* and even *Space Invaders*.

To demonstrate its capabilities, four ready-to-play games were included in the package. First up was a version of *Repton 3*, to prove that you could recreate that game using REPTOL. Then there was *Repton 4*, a brand-new adventure in the classic mould but with extra features (see the annotated In Depth screen for a closer look). Finally, there were two titles which showed off the scope of games that could be created. *Robbo* saw you playing a robot who must complete a series of illogical puzzles, while in *Trakker* you controlled a mini bulldozer tasked with defeating various nasties (and even our old friend Repton). These games gave you a taste of what could be created, with the onus on the user to let loose their creativity.

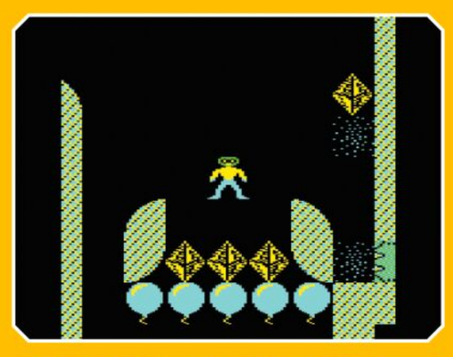
You could run *Repton Infinity* on a Model B and Electron – and we should thank Superior for catering for its core market – but it really wasn't recommended. The package featured five components (the main program, game editor, screen editor, sprite editor and file linker), plus all the data. If you had it on tape you'd be forever searching for the file you needed, forwarding and rewinding until your fingers bled. Disk was better but still not ideal. On the enhanced BBC Master version, however, all of the editors resided in memory, which meant that the shackles were off. Even the authors doubted



the worth of the 32K versions, writing in a missive hidden on the disk that the Master version was, "Quite honestly the only sensible version of the game; can you imagine what it's like having to load the editors and data in at 1,200 baud?" We didn't need to imagine. The Master version was also available on tape and it took 12 minutes to load everything in.

Where the Master hardware couldn't help was with the performance of the game engine, as the processor speed was still clocked at 2MHz. As such, the version of *Repton 3* included in *Repton Infinity* ran noticeably slower than the standalone *Repton 3*. This was unfortunate, but didn't take the shine off one of the most impressive and ambitious titles ever released for the Beeb.

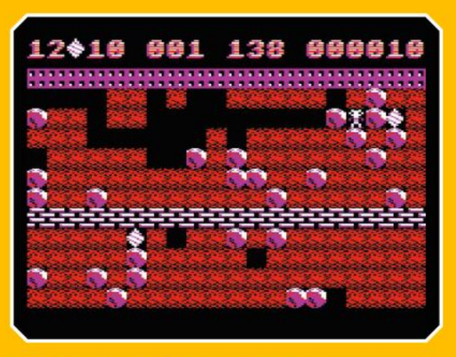
## IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



### REPTON: THE LOST REALMS

BBC/ELECTRON

■ *Repton* fan Paras Sidapara submitted this to Superior in 1988 as *Repton 4*. It was rejected at the time, but in 2012 it was dusted down, tidied up and released by Retro Software under this title. It featured 24 challenging screens and various new hazards.



### BOULDER DASH

VARIOUS

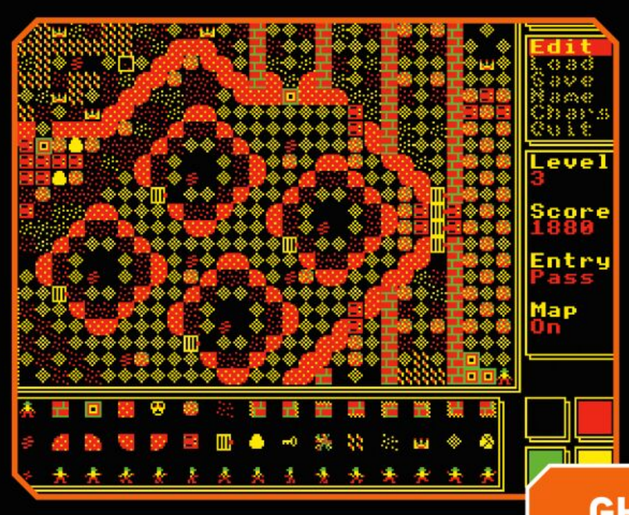
■ The game that provided the inspiration for *Repton* was later released for the BBC Micro by Tynesoft and features on page 44. A curious decision, but if you were looking for arcade thrills over measured exploration then Rockford was your man. Like *Repton*, *Boulder Dash* spawned many sequels, including one with a level designer.

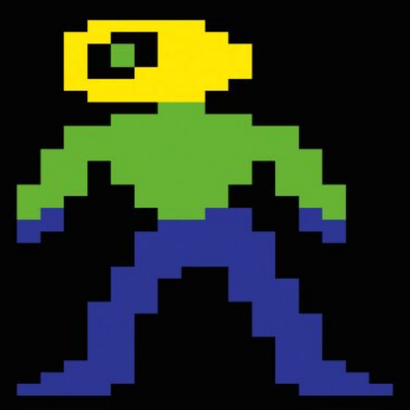
### DUNJUNZ

BBC/ELECTRON

■ *Gauntlet* wasn't released for the Beeb, but fear not as Bug-Byte stepped up with this four-player dungeon crawler. Unlike the original, each player had their own mini screen which was... interesting. Plus, if you bought the game on disk, it came with a utility for creating your very own devious dungeons.

» [BBC Micro] What's Mr Chips doing? Actually, this is Robbo the robot, going about his business.



## IN DEPTH

### BLOCK ROCKING

■ Exclusive to *Repton 4*, this rock is a Magiblock. In the grand tradition of puzzle games, if you push three together you'll be rewarded with bonus treasure to boost your score.

### GHOUL SCHOOL

■ Replacing the monsters from *Repton 3*, these ghosts will give chase and you have to crush them to kill them. Avoid photocopies unless you're pining for a game of *Pac-Man*.

### DO YOU COPY?

■ The photocopier is both a blessing and a curse, as it makes copies of almost anything in the game. Duplicating Magiblocks is good. Accidentally cloning ghosts is not so good.

### NOTE PERFECT

■ In *Repton 4* the most coveted collectable you can find on your travels is the £10 note. They're worth 50 points, but don't get greedy as they can sometimes bait you into traps.

# Minority Report

## TIME AND MAGIK

■ DEVELOPER: **MANDARIN** ■ YEAR: **1988**

■ **This handsome collection housed three of Level 9's classic adventures: *Lords Of Time* (1983), *Red Moon* (1985) and *The Price Of Magik* (1986).** All of them had previously been released for the BBC, but now they were running on a revised version of the A-Code language which allowed for more detailed text descriptions. Better still, they were designed to provide additional features if extra memory was detected. Even one sideways RAM bank would allow you to undo moves, edit previous commands and save your position to memory (which you could quickly restore after getting chomped by a sabre-toothed tiger, for instance). But if you had both sideways RAM *and* shadow RAM available, which in most cases meant running it on a Master, you'd also get to see a series of colour pictures which slid smoothly into view from the top of the screen.

Location pictures are still a touchy subject for many interactive fiction fans. Did we really need them when the text descriptions already allowed us to form far more vivid depictions in our heads? If you did appreciate the pictures then you couldn't fail to be impressed with them on the BBC – they rivalled those on the Amstrad CPC and Commodore 64, and were certainly preferable to the black and white images which appeared on the Spectrum disk version. Of course, purists could do away with the pictures altogether if they wished.

Level 9 and its publishing partners supported the BBC range extensively and several other adventures were enhanced for expanded machines, including *Scapeghost*, *Ingrid's Back* and *Knight Orc* (which was unreleased but recovered and shared with the community in 2019).

What now? UP
You are on a sloping roof, walking unsteadily on the slick grey slates.
What now? UP
You are on a roof, high above the dismal marshes and mist-covered plain.
What now? EXITS
Exits are west to the east of an attic and downwards to a sloping roof.

» [BBC Micro] The location graphics were generally excellent, conveying enough atmosphere to bring the scenes to life.

of history against the evil Timelords.
Your task is to collect nine critical objects from Earth's history - each is marked with the holy hourglass - and place them in the cauldron at the end of Time. May Fortune smile upon you!"
His message complete, Father Time steps back into the picture.
What now?

» [BBC Micro] Originally released in 1983, and riffing heavily on *Doctor Who, Lords Of Time* is recognised as one of Level 9's best adventures.

What now? NORTH
The door closes behind you.
You are at the end of a gravel drive which bends to the southwest. The grassy lawns beside the drive are edged with the vibrant colours of summer flowers. A narrow country road runs north-south and the drone of bees fills the warm air.
What now?

» [BBC Micro] Besides the pictures, each game was updated to include more text, which meant more detail.

# MORE GAMES TO PLAY

### » STRYKER'S RUN

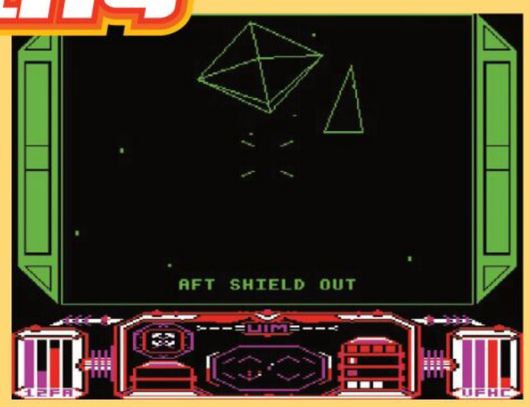
■ PUB: **SUPERIOR**
■ YEAR: **1986**

■ This classic run-and-gun game was the first title to include a special 128K version for Master users. The extra memory allowed for many more background graphics and buildings (such as a ruined cinema, showing *Rocky 20*), and the ability to razz around in a tank in addition to the usual chopper. It also included an excellent title tune by Martin Galway and a high score table. If you owned a Master this was a game to show it off.

### » EXILE

■ PUB: **SUPERIOR**
■ YEAR: **1988**

■ Probably not a game you've never played (and if you haven't, why not?), but it serves as an excellent example of what extra memory brought to the party. With sideways RAM fitted you got the full-screen display, whereas on a stock Model B half of the screen was left blank to preserve memory. The enhanced version also featured some nifty sampled speech, which added another factor to what was already a stunning arcade adventure.




### » UIM

■ PUB: **4TH DIMENSION**
■ YEAR: **1989**

■ Publishers always ensured that their games would run on an unexpanded Model B, even if it meant that certain features were missing. But not this one. You needed at least 16K of sideways RAM installed to even run it. If you had the hardware, *UIM* (*Ultra Intelligent Machine*) was worth it, playing very much like an underwater version of *Elite*. Special mention must be given to the graphics which are surprisingly flicker-free.

### » VERTIGO

■ PUB: **SUPERIOR**
■ YEAR: **1991**

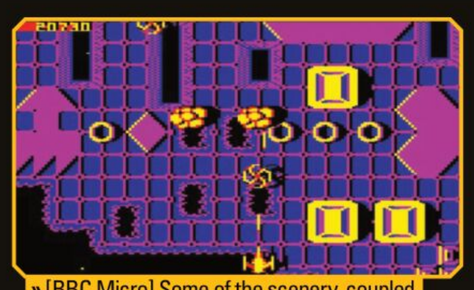
■ This smart isometric puzzler rolled onto the Beeb as part of the *Play It Again Sam 16* collection (it was never available on its own, meaning that it was overlooked by many). On a Model B it was strictly monochrome and therefore a little drab, but when played on a Master it utilised a four-colour Mode 1 display that really popped off the screen. It looked pretty but it was downright evil, with 50 challenging screens to complete.

# FIRETRACK

■ DEVELOPER: **ELECTRIC DREAMS** ■ YEAR: **1987**

■ **The BBC Micro was awash with unofficial clones of classic arcade games – *Mr Ee!*, *Zalaga*, *Zany Kong* and so on.** Here was another and this one was inspired by *Star Force*, Tehkan's hit shooter from 1984. Yet this was no quick and dirty cash-in. Programmer Nick 'Orlando' Pelling was always looking for a coding challenge and with *FireTrack* he managed to produce a colourful, fast-paced vertical shooter that pushed the limits of the hardware. And that wasn't all. *FireTrack* was built on an adaptive engine, so the more memory you had, the more expansive the game was. This meant new music, more objects, extra scenery elements and a clutch of different worlds to raze. If shadow RAM was also present the display would be double-buffered, so the game was both smooth and speedy. In short, this masterpiece was best played on a Master.

If you managed to complete the game's eight worlds the end text promised a sequel, *FireTrack II: Beyond The White Hole*. Orlando revealed in **RG** 144 that he never began work on the follow-up due to disappointing sales of the original, amongst other things. Fast-forward to 2017 and an unofficial homebrew sequel did arrive – *White Light* by Sarah Walker and John Blythe. If you're a fan of *FireTrack* then *White Light* might just be your new favourite shooter on the system.



» [BBC Micro] Some of the scenery, coupled with the BBC's vibrant colour palette, gives *FireTrack* an almost abstract feel.

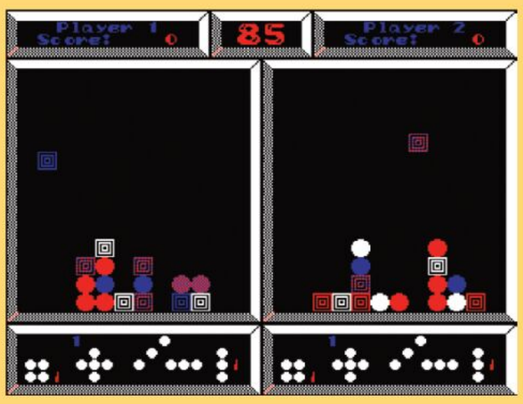
» [BBC Micro] The action begins to hot up when you visit the ice world Shail.

## RETRO STINKER

### » THE LIVING DAYLIGHTS

■ DOMARK ■ 1987

■ Another dodgy *Bond* game from Domark that involved a bit of running, jumping, shooting – and yawning. The Master version did away with the multi-load. If only Domark had done away with the whole damn game.



## » TACTIC

■ PUB: **SUPERIOR**
■ YEAR: **1992**

■ Like *Vertigo*, this too was only available on a Superior collection (*Play It Again Sam 17*). Its Master enhancements were slim – the colours changed every eight levels – but whatever model you played it on, this was a gem of a puzzle game. The idea was to arrange the falling blocks so that they matched the arrangements at the bottom of the screen. A versus mode that let you engage another player in a points battle sealed the deal.

## » SHOVE-IT

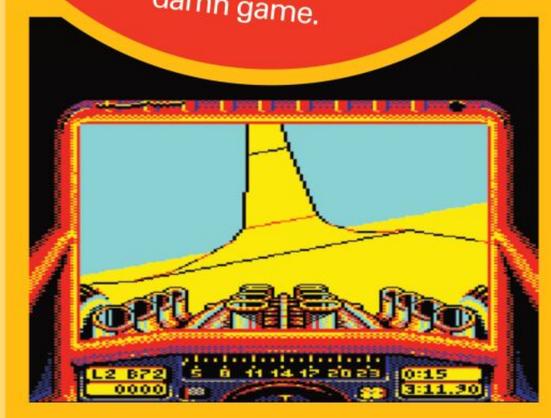
■ PUB: **N/A**
■ YEAR: **2004**

■ This deceptively simple puzzle game was submitted to Superior back in the day, but it was rejected as the BBC Micro market was shrinking. In 2004, its author Melvyn Garcia discovered the game in a box of disks and submitted it to the Stairway To Hell website for us all to enjoy – particularly Master users as the graphics are in colour (Model B owners have to make do with monochrome). It even includes a built-in level designer.

## » PRINCE OF PERSIA

■ PUB: **BITSHIFTERS**
■ YEAR: **2018**

■ Jordan Mechner's classic was ported to the Master by Kieran Connell with help from his fellow Bitshifters. Utilising the original Apple II 6502 source code, and making full use of the Master's memory, including double-buffering for a smoother display, the result is pretty special. In fact, it could be the best 8-bit home computer version available. You can read an interview with Kieran about this awesome port in issue 186.



## » STUNT CAR RACER

■ PUB: **BITSHIFTERS**
■ YEAR: **2019**

■ Geoff Crammond established himself with BBC classics like *Revs* and *The Sentinel*, but one of his most memorable titles, *Stunt Car Racer*, never appeared on the machine. That was addressed recently when Kieran Connell followed *Prince Of Persia* with this hugely impressive port for the Master that packs in all of the original's hair-raising features. Crucially, it performs really well too, with a zippy framerate throughout.

# Super Nintendo (SNS-101)

» **MANUFACTURER:** Nintendo » **YEAR:** 1997
» **COST:** $99.95 (launch), £160+ (today, boxed), £100+ (today, unboxed)

**Although it had launched the N64 in 1996, Nintendo believed that there was still value to be extracted from the SNES market in North America.** To achieve this goal, the company introduced this cost-reduced version of the 16-bit hardware in October 1997. Lance Barr's design retains the grey and purple colour scheme he originally introduced with the American SNES, but the casing is now smaller and less boxy, and features such as the rarely used expansion port and the cartridge eject button were removed. Support for RGB and S-video output was also removed. Nintendo's instincts were correct, as 1.85 million consoles and 13.71 million cartridges were sold in the region in the financial year ending in March 1998, and 1.39 million consoles and 5.2 million cartridges were sold in the 1999 financial year.

Today, this particular model of the SNES is prized by modders because the RGB video output can actually be restored. Many earlier SNES consoles had fairly soft RGB output, but the 1CHIP motherboard variant of the original SNS-001 model and an appropriately modded SNS-101 both offer sharper images. As a result, many of the consoles available for sale today will come pre-modded to enable this high-quality signal. *

## ESSENTIAL GAME
### Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island

This was the pack-in game for most SNS-101 consoles, and it stands as a great example of what late era SNES gaming had to offer in the era of polygonal dominance. All of the great stage design and clever gimmicks associated with the *Mario* platformers were present and correct, with Yoshi's egg-throwing and need to protect the baby Mario providing an interesting new twist. Add to that some very cool special effects thanks to the inclusion of the Super FX2 chip, and you've got a great game that serves as the perfect introduction to an incredible console.

## Super Nintendo (SNS-101) fact

■ A Japanese variant of this console, officially named the Super Famicom Jr, was manufactured until 2003. It can be distinguished by its grey buttons, darker grey cartridge slot and Super Famicom logo.

**PROCESSORS:** 16-BIT RICOH 5A22, CUSTOMISED 65C816 (3.58 MHZ)

**RAM:** 128KB MAIN MEMORY, 64KB VIDEO MEMORY, 64KB AUDIO MEMORY

**GRAPHICS:** CUSTOM 16-BIT PPU WITH MAXIMUM 512X448 DISPLAY (256X224 TYPICAL), 128 SPRITES PER SCREEN, UP TO 256 COLOURS PER LINE FROM A PALETTE OF 32,768

**AUDIO:** SONY S-SMP, EIGHT CHANNEL ADPCM

**MEDIA:** ROM CARTRIDGE (UP TO 128 MEGABIT, LARGEST OFFICIAL RELEASE 48 MEGABIT)

# FROM THE ARCHIVES

» [MSX] The stylish loading screen from *Deus Ex Machina*.

# NU WAVE SOFTWARE

The short-lived NU WAVE label from CRL was home to an eclectic and experimental series of games, with an emphasis on artificial intelligence. Retro Gamer talks to founder Clem Chambers and the programmers to find out more

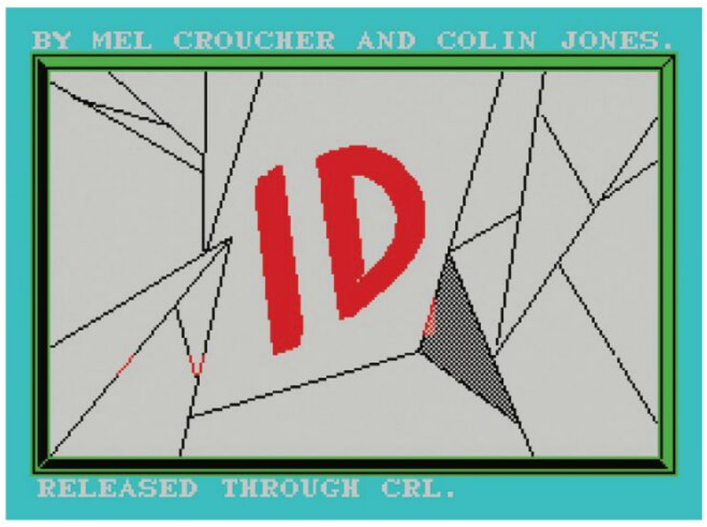
**WORDS BY ANDREW FISHER**

**Clem Chambers launched Computer Rentals Limited in 1982.** "I started it after I left school. I didn't get the grades to go study industrial archaeology (thank goodness). I rented the cheapest office possible across the road from where the Kray Twins were brought up, over a tailor's shop on Whitechapel Road." The King's Yard address became home to The Zen Room programming team, and the name changed to CRL. Then Clem saw a game that inspired him.

"The whole computer game thing was so new it all felt experimental to me. Successful games were often totally unique, so it seemed that was an exciting tack to take for games and one that would have an audience," says Clem. "*Deus Ex Machina* by Automata influenced me that a game could be wildly experimental and still be a success. To do something first and unique excited my creativity, which it always has and still does. Nothing beats being on the bleeding edge. It's only there you can move fast, have a clean sheet to work with and almost by chance come up with something startling."

Clem started a new publishing label under CRL called Nu Wave Software. We asked how he came up with it and about its connotations with the strange and unusual. "I'm not sure about saying they were strange, apart from that being a correct usage of the word, because strange has a negative connotation of threat and foreboding. They just weren't games where little fellows ran around with hammers. We did look for games for the label, not the other way around," he replies.

First up was *iD*, by Mel Croucher and Colin Jones. "It was originally my idea, and [Mel] took it, morphed it, and made it his own," explains Clem. "My idea would have been

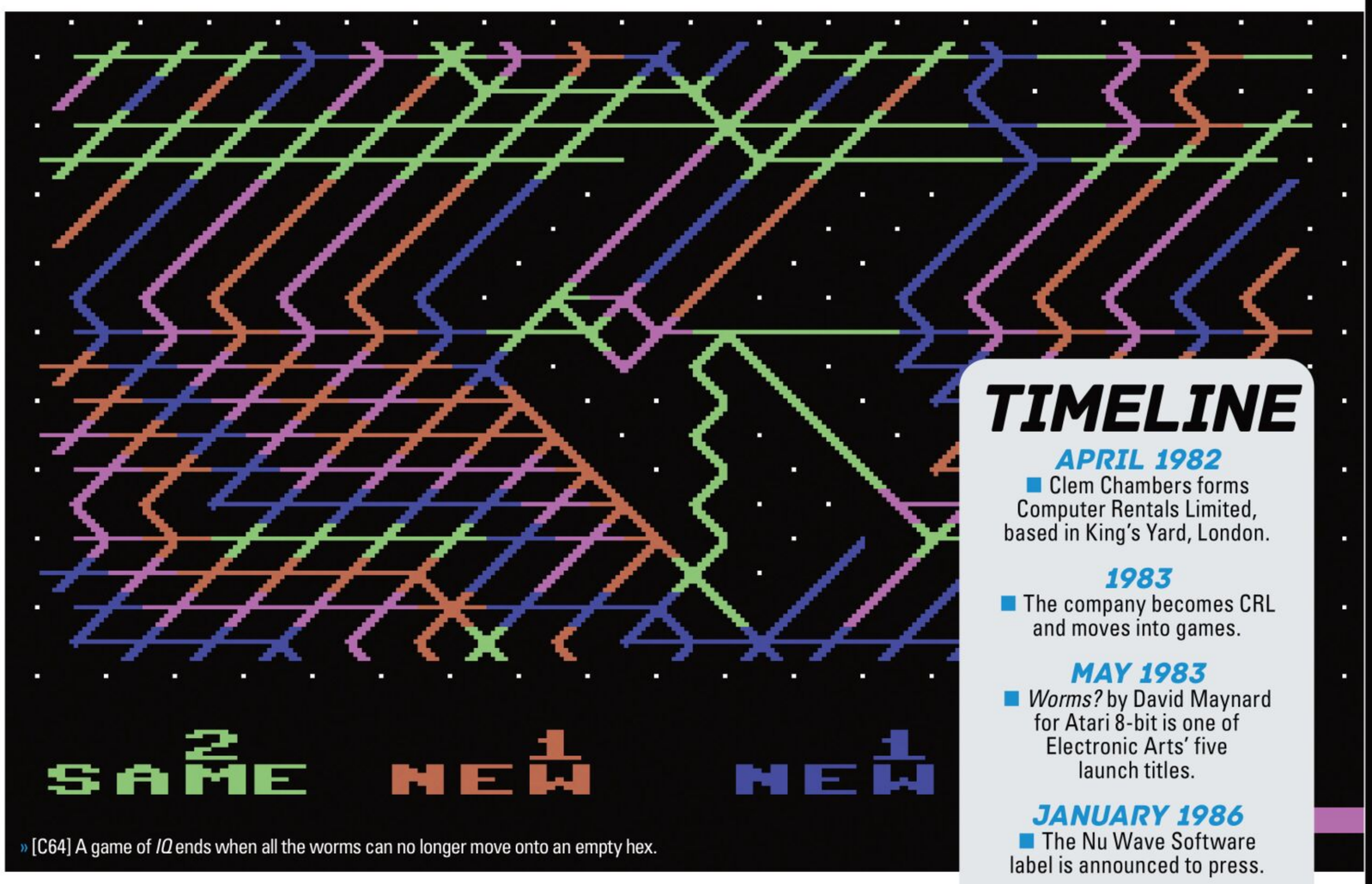



» [ZX Spectrum] When *iD* loads up, the screen appears to crack – a hint that something is trapped.

more abstract, but his take was tremendous and better and more accessible. It was as if I had said, 'We need a fantasy story about little guys,' and he went off and wrote *The Hobbit*. Mel's work in games was immensely influential at the time. He is also chronically experimental." Did Clem enjoy collaborating with a genius like Mel? "It was as easy as pie (or pi). Really brilliant people are very often highly productive, and Mel is a machine when it comes to output."

"I'd been lucky enough to be in one of the first schools to do computer science at O-level, and I did a degree in architectural studies. The combination seemed to do the trick," says Colin Jones about his entry into programming. "I'd sent a text adventure, *Paradise In Microdot*, to Automata. Mel saw something in it which struck a chord with him. He asked me to program C64 *Deus Ex Machina*." Colin switched machines for *iD*. An alien intelligence is trapped on Earth, inside your ZX Spectrum. The player types in answers to iD's questions, trying to increase its Trust levels and find out the various identities and objects iD had previously been. It was a difficult game to review, with *Sinclair User*'s 6/10 countered by *Crash!*'s sensible decision not to award a mark.

"It was a funny old game," Colin admits. "Clem had the initial idea. Then we sort of strung a being together with little routines and quirks. A bit like knitting an extremely complicated cardigan. Mel would come up with most of the text and I'd come up with most of the programming, but there was a crossover because of the way the game developed. It got to the point where you couldn't really separate the writing from the programming." Colin did enjoy his time working with Mel. "Mel was a kindred spirit," he continues. "We both had a vision of computer entertainment which went beyond traditional games. He had established himself with Automata and reached a position where he could develop such ideas. *Deus Ex Machina* shocked the entire industry. He played a blinder."

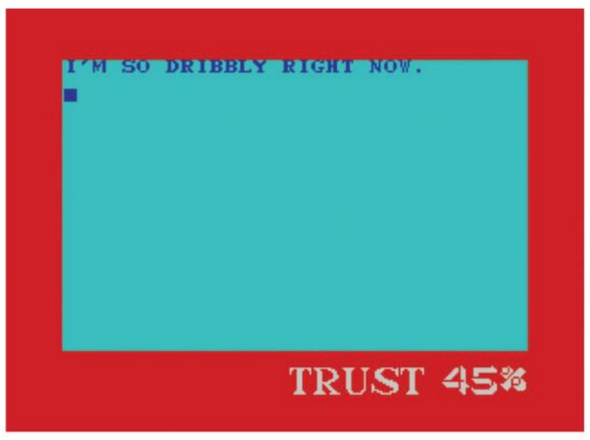



» [C64] A game of *IQ* ends when all the worms can no longer move onto an empty hex.

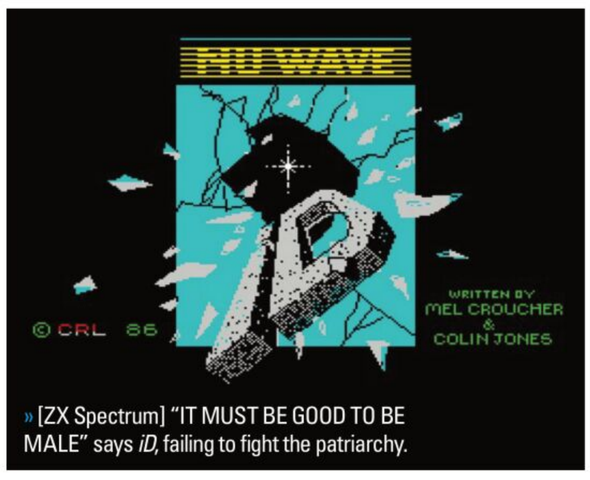
> "DEUS EX MACHINA INFLUENCED ME THAT A GAME COULD BE WILDLY EXPERIMENTAL AND STILL BE A SUCCESS"
>
> **CLEM CHAMBERS**

**Next up was *Tubular Bells*, in association with Mike Oldfield and The Zen Room – the C64 generating patterns of dots and lines while music played.** "We saw a demo of the moiré pattern on C64 and thought it was fabulous. I wanted to link it up with music, but we found you didn't have to as your brain did that all on its own," says Clem. Clever Music – Graham Jarvis and Robert Hartshorne – created SID covers of the album, having worked on *The Rocky Horror Show* (CRL) and *Wizardry* (The Edge). "It was a fine rendition for the SID chip. No one ever complained," remembers Clem, although the critical *Zzap! 64* review (44% overall) did mention it sounded like *Wizardry*. An interesting sidenote is the similarities to Jeff Minter's early light synthesiser *Psychedelia*. "I think we actually licensed that too, in some convoluted 'buy the manual off Jeff and duplicate the software' arrangement. Jeff, another genius. He also hadn't at that stage linked the images up to audio input." As Nu Wave and CRL continued to grow, Clem signed a distribution deal with Electronic Arts. The ▶

» David Maynard back in 1983, as photographed by Norman Seeff for Electronic Arts.



» [ZX Spectrum] Defining words such as GAME, LOVE and HATE will build up *iD*'s Trust level and boost its mood




» [ZX Spectrum] "IT MUST BE GOOD TO BE MALE" says *iD*, failing to fight the patriarchy.

## TIMELINE

**APRIL 1982**
■ Clem Chambers forms Computer Rentals Limited, based in King's Yard, London.

**1983**
■ The company becomes CRL and moves into games.

**MAY 1983**
■ *Worms?* by David Maynard for Atari 8-bit is one of Electronic Arts' five launch titles.

**JANUARY 1986**
■ The Nu Wave Software label is announced to press.

**MARCH 1986**
■ *Crash!* interviews Mel Croucher about the forthcoming *iD*.

**APRIL 1986**
■ *iD* for the ZX Spectrum launches, leaving reviewers feeling confused.

**AUGUST 1986**
■ *Tubular Bells* for the Commodore 64 launches, licensed from Virgin Music and Mike Oldfield.

**1987**
■ CRL signs a European distribution deal with Electronic Arts, giving Clem a glimpse of *Worms?*.

**MARCH 1987**
■ *Deus Ex Machina* for MSX released. It receives a negative review from *Computer Gamer* magazine.

**JULY 1987**
■ *IQ* for the Commodore 64 launches, with *Zzap! 64* awarding it an impressive 84%.

**JUNE 1988**
■ *ACE* magazine publishes rumours of trouble between CRL and Electronic Arts.

**JULY 1989**
■ Legal action to end the EA distribution deal begins.

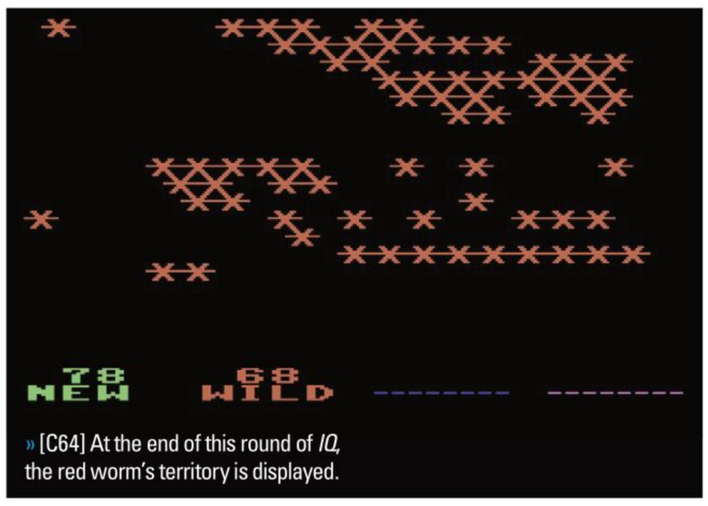
**1989**
■ CRL closes its doors due to financial struggles.

**MARCH 2015**
■ *Deus Ex Machina 2* launches on Steam, with the new cast including Sir Christopher Lee.

**MAY 2021**
■ Source code to *Worms?* (Atari and C64) is recovered and released under a free license by David Maynard.

» [ZX Spectrum] – "Strange Fruit" is a clue to a biblical identity from *iD*'s past.

» [C64] The stylish new loading screen Nu Wave created for *IQ* was based on the cover artwork.




» [C64] At the end of this round of *IQ*, the red worm's territory is displayed.

giant American company was in the process of enlarging into Europe.

Back in 1983, Electronic Arts had launched with five games, and the most unusual was called *Worms?* – developed by David Maynard for Atari 8-bit. "I remembered reading an article in the November 1971 issue of *Scientific American* magazine by Martin Gardner, about 'Paterson's Worms'. This was the kernel of the idea for *Worms?* I quickly realised that I could turn it into a four-player game on the Atari," says David. "I then realised that it could be made into an interesting territory capture game, by having the last worm to lay a trail out of a hex score a point for that hex." David then found Bill Ragsdale's FIG-Forth on Public Domain. "Learning Forth, the Atari hardware and 6502 Assembly all together were the hardest. Making the Vertical Interrupt routines, written in 6502 assembly, play nice with Forth code was probably the most challenging part. Waiting for interminably slow Atari 810 disk drives was frustrating. I think it took well over 30 minutes to do a full compile. It took me about six months of working at home in the evenings and on weekends to get a playable demo. Then it took about six months to get official release from Xerox of any possible claim they may have to the works, since they were officially my employer during development. (My biggest expense in developing *Worms?* was lawyer's fees.)" David featured in the influential 'We see Farther' advertising, championing the creators behind EA's early games. "I was very honoured. However, at that point none of us were famous. EA hired the best rock photographer, Norman Seeff. You would recognise many of your favourite rock artists in his photographs, [and] the famous picture of Steve Jobs sitting cross-legged with a Macintosh in his lap. I found out many years later that EA spent more on ad placements for that one ad than they did total development cost of all of the launch products combined." Another aspect that made *Worms?* stand out was the sounds it generated as the worms moved. "A good friend and fellow EA pioneer, Steve Hayes, helped me with the audio," David says. "I think it was his idea to use a pentatonic scale, which gives the game its Oriental-sounding flavour. *Worms?* was SO different that it quickly became a sort of cult product. Reviewers loved it because it was so different, and consumers hated it because it was so different."

> "I ALWAYS UNDERESTIMATED THE AMOUNT OF WORK IN DEUS EX MACHINA"
> **COLIN JONES**

Nu Wave published *Worms?* under alternative title *IQ*. "[EA] got upset when we licensed it because they refused to do it themselves on C64, at least in Europe, and then up we popped and did it instead. The name change was us trying to calm the situation down," explains Clem, as he recalls working with David. "He was a supercool guy. The typical Bay Area super-smart nerd dude. I loved what he did so I felt it totally fitted in with what we wanted to do, and I thought it was awful it wasn't going to get a release, so releasing it achieved two things."

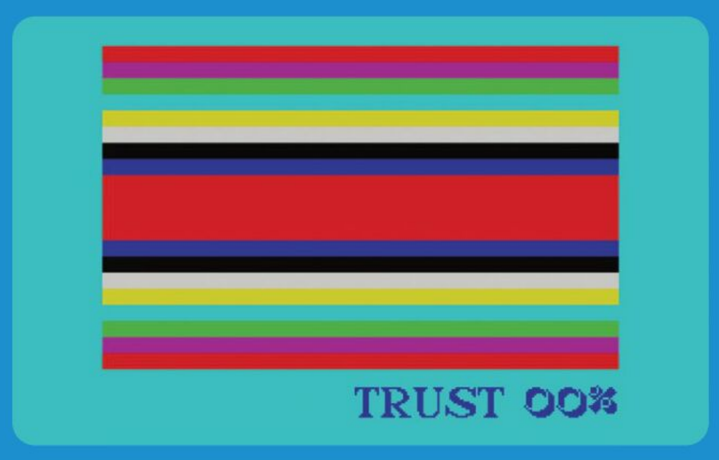
**David did the C64 port himself.** "It was relatively easy because EA had already ported the Forth kernel for the 'Cut & Paste' text editor and the 'Financial Cookbook' application. Nu Wave expressed an interest in publishing the game in Europe. EA was not interested in marketing the game any further anywhere and agreed that I could license it. I signed a deal for a small advance and sent the ported code over. That was the last I heard of it until several years later, when I got a letter from a British bankruptcy court saying there were no funds to cover the debt owed to me."

Mel and Colin contributed an MSX conversion of *Deus Ex Machina*. Why did this come about? Clem bluntly replies, "Because it was there." Colin elaborates saying, "After the C64 version I was asked to program the MSX version. I always underestimated the amount of work in *Deus Ex Machina*, and Andrew Stagg programmed the ZX Spectrum version, so I didn't really get much of a benefit." Referring to how many MSX titles were ported from Spectrum, Colin reflects on the MSX hardware. "MSX promised a number of future

# DNA OF NU WAVE SOFTWARE

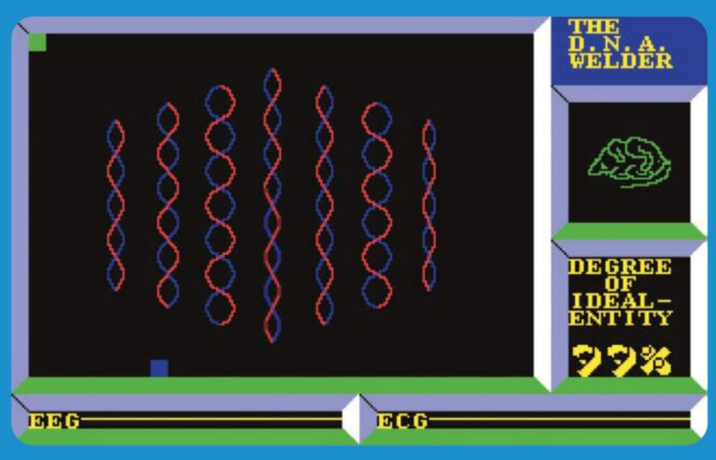
## 8-BIT

■ Nu Wave stuck to the 8-bit machines at a time when other publishers were migrating to 16-bit. Supporting the older formats, including the MSX, C64 and Spectrum played to the strengths of the developers and let them try out and experiment with some very innovative ideas.



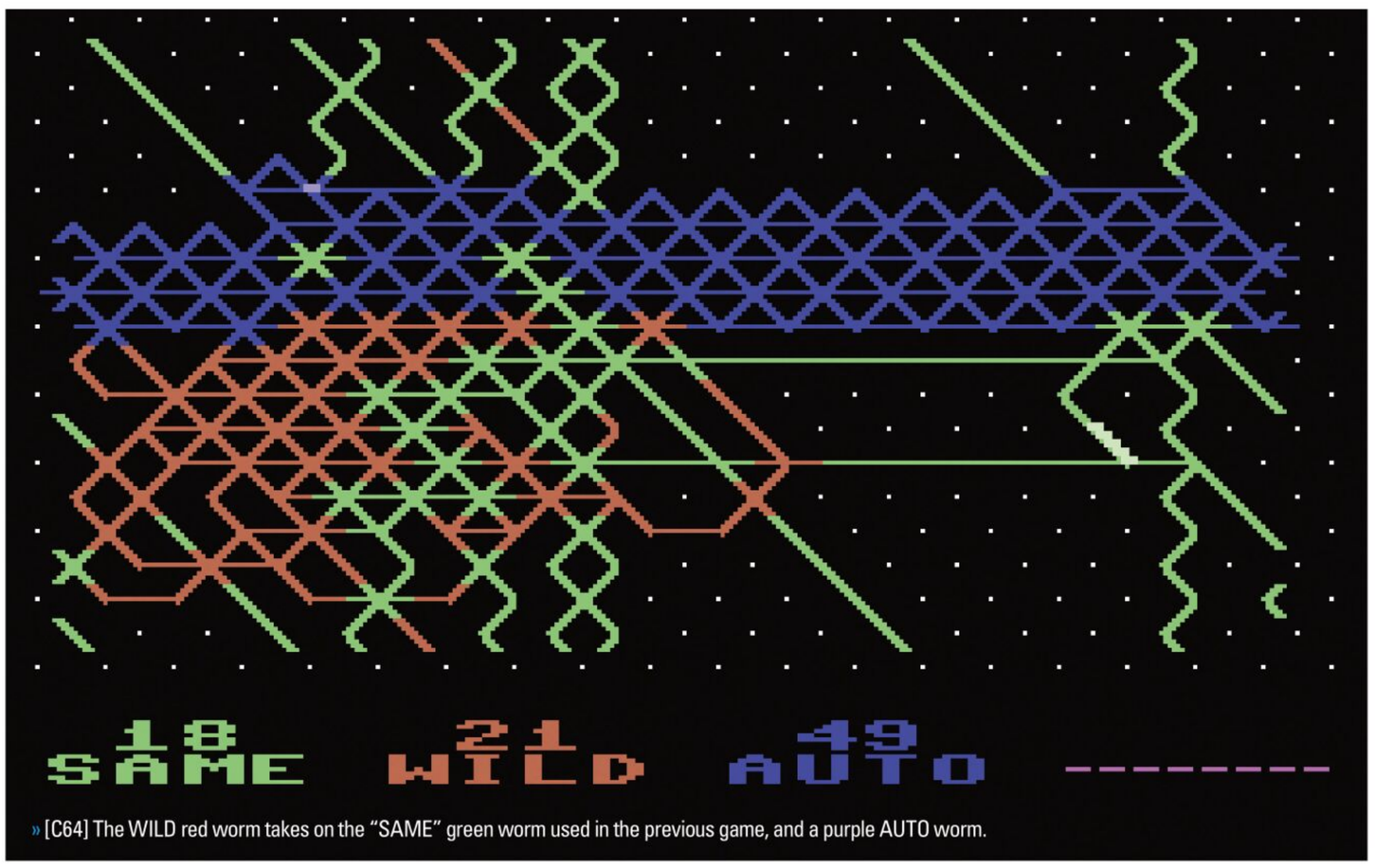

## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

■ *iD* and *IQ* were very unusual in featuring early forms of artificial intelligence, especially given the limited memory of the 8-bit computers. *iD* shows it is 'thinking' with a pattern of coloured bars, while the SAILs (worms) in *IQ* learn and follow a simple set of rules.




## MEL CROUCHER

■ Not only did Mel turn Clem's idea for an alien intelligence stuck inside a computer into reality in the game *iD*, but he also brought with him the rights to *Deus Ex Machina* enabling the MSX release. It was also a way of repaying Clem's long-term support for Mel's work.

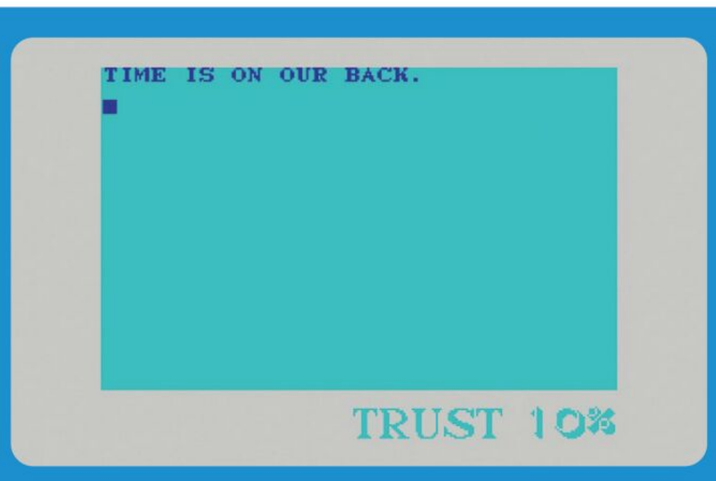



» [C64] The WILD red worm takes on the "SAME" green worm used in the previous game, and a purple AUTO worm.

benefits, including the ability to superimpose graphics on top of a TV signal or video. Mel and I had some working demos of games running over pop videos, running in perfect sync. It was pretty revolutionary." Colin has nothing but praise for Clem and Nu Wave. "It was a heroic attempt to develop ideas in the UK games industry. Fair play to him for putting his money where his mouth was. He wrote us cheques, you know. I was extremely lucky to be involved with a handful of people who fostered and allowed true creativity. After *iD* I fell in with Codemasters, who were equally supportive and let me write *Slightly Magic* and *Rock Star Ate My Hamster*. I couldn't have asked for more."

**While Electronic Arts was going from strength to strength, CRL was struggling.** 16-bit projects were slow to finish, and the 8-bit market was declining. A fifth game – *Darkness At Dawn*, by Colin – was in development but never published. "EA killed CRL and thus Nu Wave," says Clem. *ACE* magazine broke the news, CRL stating it was owed large unpaid sums. Less than a month later *ACE* would claim a "messy divorce" was underway. CRL tried to continue for another year before closing its doors, and Clem left the software industry behind. Does he feel there is enough innovation these days? "I'm sure there is plenty on the margin," he replies. Would he ever go back to games? "Never say never, but it would have to be something truly breathtaking." ✱

» [C64] In Line Mode, *Tubular Bells* generates masses of lines whose symmetry and colour can be altered.




## EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

There is a theme running through all of Nu Wave's games, in that they are different to the mainstream and do not feature traditional gameplay. A light synthesiser, a software toy, an artificial intelligence and the multimedia *Deus Ex Machina* add up to an eclectic release list.

## DARKNESS AT DAWN

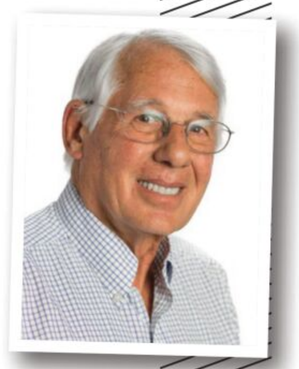
The fifth and unreleased Nu Wave title would have cemented the label's reputation for being experimental. Previews in the press mentioned that this was a text adventure played entirely without graphics – sounds would have guided the player through puzzles. Colin Jones had completed it, but it was never published.

# WHERE ARE THEY NOW

## CLEM CHAMBERS

After his time at CRL, Clem is no longer in the games industry. "I run ADVFN, an international share trading information site," he tells us. "The stock market is the biggest multiplayer game – if you play it well the points are real. I don't game, because if I did, I would get sucked back into the vortex and then I'd be back making games again..."

## DAVID MAYNARD

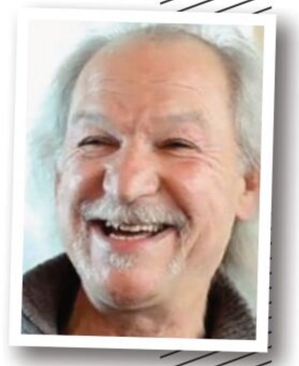


David left Electronic Arts in 1989 to join Silicon Graphics, worked with Trip Hawkins again at 3DO and Digital Chocolate, before joining Google. David retired from cloud specialists Box Inc back in 2017. He has recently launched *Darworms*, an online version of *Worms?* that can be played in a browser at www.darworms.com.

## COLIN JONES

Colin still finds himself working in the games industry. "My company Potassium Frog released *Deus Ex Machina 2* through Steam and app stores, and I re-programmed the original *Deus Ex Machina*," he proudly tells us. "I've just put the text adventure *Microdot Reimagined* on potassiumfrog.com, and a swathe of my artwork at crefft.cymru. My books are often found topping the Welsh-language Amazon book charts."

## MEL CROUCHER



Mel has written the brilliant book *Deus Ex Machina – The Greatest Game You've Probably Never Played*, summing up his pioneering career from Automata to the struggle to launch *Deus Ex Machina 2*. He became a pioneer in viral marketing and digital music distribution, working with celebrities as diverse as Eminem, Prince and Frank Zappa.

# Robotron: 2084

## WHO NEEDS TWIN STICKS?

RETROREVIVAL

» LYNX » 1991 » SHADOWSOFT

**Even though I've long since sold my console, I'll always have a soft spot for Atari's Lynx.** While it was an absolute powerhouse next to Nintendo's Game Boy, history has taught us that Atari's portable fell down in two rather crucial areas: battery life and game diversity.

The former was rarely an issue for me as I'd typically play my Lynx during lunchtimes at work, so I'd simply connect to the mains. The game side was more of an issue however and I became fed up of taking the 40-minute bus ride to Columbia Computers each Friday, only to be told that no new Lynx games had been released that week.

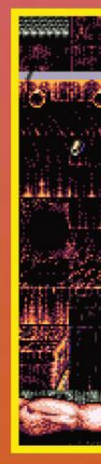
Fortunately, my trips didn't always end in vain and on one occasion I was lucky enough to snag a copy of *Robotron: 2084*, a game I had absolutely adored playing in the arcades a good ten years previously. I didn't care that I was effectively spending £25 quid on a decade-old game, I didn't mind one bit. I just wanted something good to play on my ailing Lynx and as I was well aware of the game's quality before purchasing it, it felt like money well spent.

It's a pity Shadowsoft only developed a handful of arcade ports for Atari's console, as it absolutely nailed titles like *Joust* and *Robotron*. Granted, the Lynx was never going to replicate the twin-stick controls of the original arcade game, but Shadowsoft came up with a solid alternative where your hero constantly fires and you use the A and B buttons to rotate your fire. It's not ideal, but it does work and the pace of the game, while obviously slower than its arcade counterpart, still plays at a quick enough speed that everything stays nice and hectic.

In fact one particular session became so intense that I completely lost track of time and was only reminded of my lateness when my manager came upstairs, shouted something unprintable at me and unplugged my Lynx. If only I'd kept some batteries in my machine as back up. ✱

THE MAKING OF

# FIRST SAMURAI



**HAVING CUT ITS TEETH WITH THE ACTION ADVENTURES TIME MACHINE AND HAMMERFIST, VIVID IMAGE CEMENTED ITS PLACE AS ONE OF EUROPE'S FINEST DEVELOPERS OF THE NINETIES WITH ITS THIRD GAME. RETRO GAMER CHATS TO THE TEAM BEHIND THIS FAST AND FURIOUS SAMURAI ADVENTURE**

**WORDS BY GRAEME MASON**

## IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** IMAGE WORKS
- **DEVELOPER:** VIVID IMAGE
- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **PLATFORM:** AMIGA, VARIOUS
- **GENRE:** ACTION ADVENTURE

MEV DINC

**While the 8 and 16-bit games *Time Machine* and *Hammerfist*, released in 1990, met with decent reviews, sales were moderate, making it a solid rather than spectacular start for Vivid Image, the games development company founded by Mev Dinc alongside John Twiddy and Hugh Riley in 1989.** "I had been working on *Time Machine* for the ZX Spectrum," recalls Raffaele Cecco, the legendary ZX Spectrum coder of *Exolon* and *Cybernoid* fame. "That was a cleverly designed game, slower-paced and quite different to the litany of blasters I had done before." Raff admits to *Time Machine* being a pleasant break; he was presented with the concept and design, and 'merely' coded it, "Although no doubt I would have put my own stamp on it here and there," he adds. With all the right ingredients in place, a hit to put Vivid firmly on the map had to come – fortunately, it would prove to be third time lucky for Vivid Image.

The origins of *First Samurai* hark back to the 8-bit smash, *The Last Ninja*, a game equally revered among critics and Commodore 64 fans alike. Mev and his team pondered on a title that included the word 'first' as a neat contrast to the System 3 classic, in turn creating an interesting angle for journalists wishing to write about the game. When it came to assembling the team, Mev had little hesitation in calling on Raff following their co-operation on *Time Machine*. "We became good friends, and spent quite a bit of time together socially too," says Mev in his book, *Life Is A Game*. "Truly, Raff was not only a great programmer, but a great game designer too. And [we] always seemed to complement each other with our ideas." Unsurprisingly, the coder has equally fond memories of working with the Vivid Image founder. "Mev was always enthusiastic, encouraging and full of ideas – and had a joke for every occasion!" says Raff. "It helped that he had a technical background, so he understood the challenges and pain points. Of course, we didn't always agree on everything, but that was part of the fun and part of what made *First Samurai* so varied – and rather wacky in places."

» [Amiga] He may be the first, yet this samurai doesn't lack for agility.

Taking place in feudal Japan, *First Samurai* is the tale of a young samurai under the patronage of Lord Akira. While the pair are visiting one of the lord's villages, the Demon King descends from a nearby mountain and attacks, slaying all of the inhabitants and Lord Akira, leaving just the samurai alive to inform everybody that he has returned, and thirsts for domination of the land. As the people fight back futilely, a mage appears from a distant land and battles the Demon King, forcing it to disappear through a portal and into the future. Determined that he shall not rest until his master's killer has been avenged, the young samurai follows the King into the portal to do battle for the last time.

With Mev keen to take advantage of its superior technology, the lead platform for *First Samurai* was set as the Commodore

## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**TIME MACHINE**
**SYSTEM:** COMMODORE 64, AMSTRAD CPC, ZX SPECTRUM
**YEAR:** 1990

**STREET RACER (PICTURED)**
**SYSTEM:** AMIGA, VARIOUS
**YEAR:** 1994

**SCARS**
**SYSTEM:** NINTENDO 64, PLAYSTATION, PC
**YEAR:** 1998

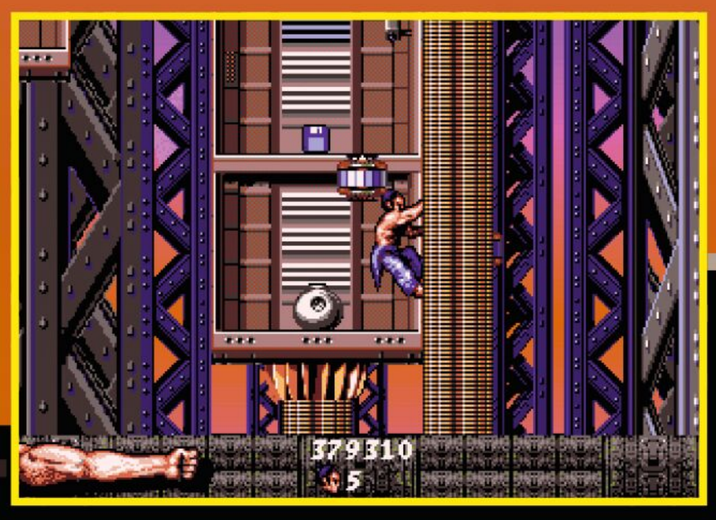
» [Amiga] Level 3 begins to change things up with its strange crystal formations.

» [Amiga] A series of stills explains the story of the Demon King at the beginning of *First Samurai*.

## "MEV WAS ALWAYS ENTHUSIASTIC, ENCOURAGING AND FULL OF IDEAS – AND HAD A JOKE FOR EVERY OCCASION!"

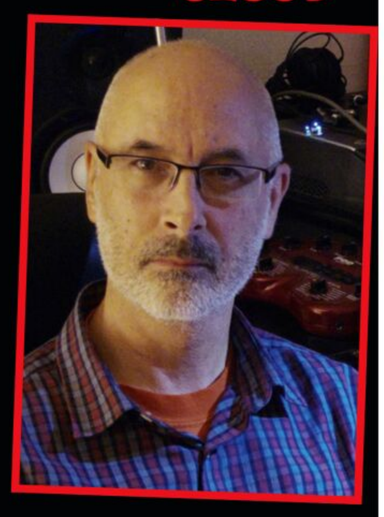
### RAFFAELE CECCO

» [Amiga] Thrust forward in time, the brave samurai battles contemporary villains.




» [Amiga] Climbing a wall in level 9's mechanical factory.

RAFFAELE CECCO



TEOMAN IRMAK

Amiga. For Raffaele Cecco, development represented a new challenge for a programmer with an excellent reputation, albeit on the 8-bit computers. "It was a different world to 8-bit," he says. "But once I got into the swing of things, I felt a bit spoilt on the Amiga, what with that great 68000 processor, the colours, the sound and the hardware assistance. It was all new and exciting stuff, a world away from the ZX Spectrum." The team was ambitious: *First Samurai* was planned as a huge game, complete with ten large and disparate levels. John Twiddy had already written a plug-in for the Amiga Deluxe Paint which made the artist's job much easier. With John also creating a level editor, the tools were in place for Raff and ▶

# CONVERSION CAPERS

## TRACING THE LONE SAMURAI ACROSS THE OTHER PLATFORMS

### AMIGA

To many, it's the game that put Mev Dinc's development house Vivid Image firmly on the map. Programmed by veteran Raffaele Cecco with graphics by Teoman Irmak, sound by Nick Jones and support from Mev himself, *First Samurai* combines beautiful graphics with challenging and fluid gameplay to create a true trailblazer of the early Nineties.

### PC

Mev Dinc took over coding reigns for the PC DOS port, retaining Teoman Irmak on graphics while Martin Walker came in for sound duties. The graphical fidelity is not quite as sharp as the Amiga original and the game was released by Ubisoft in 1992 following the Mirrorsoft debacle of a year earlier. It remains, however, a quality game that stands out from its peers of the early Nineties.

### SUPER NINTENDO

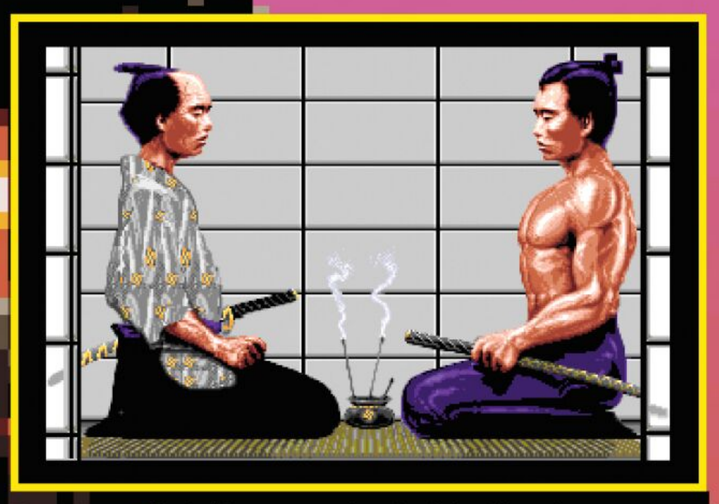
Licensed out to the Japanese development company KEMCO by Vivid Image, the SNES interpretation of *First Samurai* cuts back much of the game's graphical finesse in order to fit all of its levels into the cartridge. While the result is something that feels a little different, the base elements – relentless enemies, sword fighting and exploration – are all present and it's another fantastic Eastern-themed platformer.

### ATARI ST

Converted from the Amiga game by the dream team combo of Cecco-Irmak-Dinc-Jones, Atari ST *First Samurai* looks just as smart as the original and retains all the elements and sound design that makes it such a delight to play. The controls are a little more sluggish which can hamper in some of the more hectic moments, but overall it's another great effort by Vivid.

### COMMODORE 64

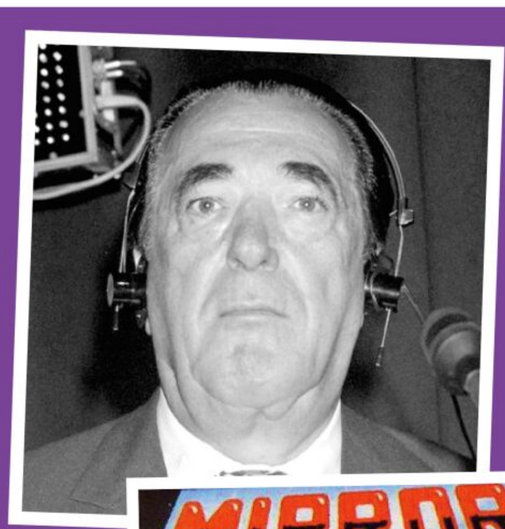
Coder Jon Williams did a superb job of converting the fast-moving and stunning *First Samurai* to the Commodore 64 as Ubisoft stepped in again to publish. While it plays quickly and retains an admirable amount of gameplay, it's the amazing graphics from Mat Sneap that astonish the most, making it one of the best-looking games on the 8-bit computer.



» [Amiga] Even a samurai needs a little chill-out time.

# WHEN MIRRORSOFT SANK

## SAVING THE FIRST SAMURAI



When, on the 5 November 1991, Mirror Group owner Robert Maxwell died after falling from his yacht near the Canary Islands, it incited a seismic effect on many companies, not least the developers who were busy creating games for Mirror Group's software house, Mirrorsoft. After Maxwell's death, enormous inconsistencies were discovered in the Mirror Group's accounts, and the company quickly subsided into bankruptcy. *First Samurai* had just shipped, and an estimated 80,000 copies had been sent to distributors for its first run on the Commodore Amiga and Atari ST. "With bated breath, we were just waiting to see what would happen, as there were so many rumours," recounts Mev in his book, *Life Is A Game*. "Suddenly, we heard the terrible news that the whole group, including Mirrorsoft had gone into receivership."

While further royalties were non-existent and Mev had to fight to get anything at all for Vivid's efforts from the receivers, he had cannily negotiated copyright and IP rights in his contract with Mirrorsoft. Thus able to continue producing the game going forward, Mev and his team worked on salvaging *First Samurai* as best as they could for other platforms with help from Ubisoft and Mev's old friend, Rod Cousens, now in charge of Acclaim Europe. While the situation was far from ideal, through Mev's persistence, Vivid Image made the best of their remarkable samurai adventure.

Teoman Irmak, *First Samurai*'s lead artist, to work on the game as efficiently as possible.

Also working at Vivid was Paul 'Dokk' Docherty, and he provided a vital early part of the game, its lead character. Remembers Raff, "I thought Dokk's main character was superb. I'd never really seen anything like that, the speed blur on the sword and the clever way it was all split up into parts to allow many different animation sequences. I really liked how the character was both cartoony and kick-ass, and I couldn't wait to get it working in the game." For reasons lost in Mev's memory, Paul didn't remain on *First Samurai*, leaving Vivid Image shortly after development began, paving the way for Teoman Irmak, whom like Mev, originates from Turkey. Having worked in digital art with companies such as Adventure International and US Gold, Teoman inherited Dokk's flexible samurai design. "The character is actually assembled in code from separately stored animation sections that comprised the head, torso, legs and sword," he explains. "This way, each section could be an independent sequence; for example, the samurai could move his head while appearing stationary." As well as looking great, the process was very memory-efficient, an important factor, even with the expanded capacities of the 16-bit computers.

Spurred on by Mev's enthusiasm, Vivid began compiling a massive amount of detail, from level design to a variety of enemies and audio. Helping out where he could, Mev's key contribution is a memorable one that gives *First Samurai* its brilliantly evocative backdrops. By using certain tricks, it was possible to fiddle past the Amiga's 16 colours, engendering a range of hues; the challenge, however, was eliminating the transition line that appears between each set of shades. Stubbornly refusing to accept the lines, Mev spent many late nights trying to find a way around the effect. After messing with the order of shades, he finally discovered the right combination, reducing the line to nothing. "We were all very pleased with the results when I finally discovered some fancy colour combinations and grading," remembers Mev, and this is none better demonstrated than in *First Samurai*'s opening level, the beautiful mauve and orange colours conjuring a gentle vibe that is at odds with the fierce action in the foreground.

**"IT WAS ALL NEW AND EXCITING STUFF, A WORLD AWAY FROM THE ZX SPECTRUM"**

**RAFFAELE CECCO**

**Mev and his team's dedication eventually brought its own issues as *First Samurai*'s development began to overrun.** "[The game] featured a lot of feature creep from what I remember," says Raff. "It took longer to develop than anticipated, with big levels, bosses and all manner of different enemies along the way." While its diversity would win *First Samurai* many admirers, it took a toll. Continues Raff, "I remember working very hard to get all the continuously evolving features implemented. In retrospect, it wasn't a great idea working that way as it dragged out development. But it worked out OK in the end." One of the sacrifices made to ensure *First Samurai* looked as good as possible was its framerate. "Yes, I would have loved 50 frames per second," notes Raff. "But no way it was going to run at that rate, so I kept things at a steady and consistent 25 frames. It might have been able to run at 50 frames in places, but seeing the game drop from 50 to 25 constantly would have been jarring." To go with the game's impressive visuals, Raff helped provide a novel set of audio cues and effects to accompany various actions. "All those crazy sound samples like the *Hallelujah* chorus were put in as a bit of a joke by me just to test out the sound sampling technology," explains Raff. "Of course, I should have guessed that Mev would want to keep them in!"

The audio element that caused the most discussion was the samurai's sweeping sword, and the noise it made upon contact with an enemy. As a placeholder, Raff had inserted a tiny segment of a sample from Verdi's *Requiem, Dies Irae*. Recalls Teoman, "During testing we'd get this glorious orchestral sound every time the sword registered a hit. Other workers in the office would come round, intrigued by this strange un-game-like sound." One day, as development neared completion, Teoman noticed the sample had been replaced with a

» [Amiga] The caverns underneath level 1 are just as hazardous as above ground.

» [Amiga] Smashing open vases reveals bonuses and power-ups.

» [Amiga] *First Samurai*'s fifth level – set on top of a fast-moving train – tests the Amiga to its limits.

» [Amiga] Taking on all manner of beasties in a contemporary office.

» [Amiga] Mev Dinc's achievements in smoothing out the background hues are perfectly shown in *First Samurai*'s opening stage.

» [Amiga] The samurai prowls the countryside as a tall statue looks on.

metallic clanging sound. More realistic, true – but less dramatic. While understanding the reasoning behind the change, a long debate ensued. "Finally good sense prevailed and the orchestral sound was reinstalled," says Teoman.

**The Amiga version of *First Samurai* was completed in 1991 and soon put into production by Mirrorsoft for publication under its Image Works label.** While events outside of Vivid's control unfortunately hampered its release (see When Mirrorsoft Sank boxout), Mev estimates that around 80,000 copies slipped out prior to Mirrorsoft's dramatic demise. Keen to press on, a new publisher was found for subsequent releases, including a technically superb yet commercially optimistic Commodore 64 version two years later.

Having become heavily involved with the C64GS, it was apparent to Mev that a lot of people were keen on a Commodore 64 port of *First Samurai*, despite the computer now being a little long in the CPU. "The team did a splendid job," he says. "And it is considered one of the all-time top five C64 games, so it was well worth the effort just for that." With other 8-bit ports ruled out ("Although I'd have liked to have done the Spectrum version myself," reveals Mev), Vivid, working with Acclaim's Rod Cousens, negotiated a deal with KEMCO to take *First Samurai* back home to Japan. Published on the Super Nintendo in 1993, Mev agreed with KEMCO to take a step back as the Japanese company sought to make the game more suited to its home market. "To be honest," notes Mev, "although technically very adept, it fell short of the Amiga version and could have been much better." Nevertheless, SNES *First Samurai* proved to be a decent critical and commercial success.

Away from the woes of Mirrorsoft, the initial Amiga version of *First Samurai* reviewed incredibly well. "A brilliant game and an object lesson to programmers everywhere in How To Do It Properly," espoused Stuart Campbell in *Amiga Power*, while *CU Amiga*'s Rik Haynes called the game "A rarity amongst its breed, [a] slash-'em-up with substance." Securing particular praise was the game's music, especially its title ditty, a marvellously bouncy tune composed by long-time Cecco collaborator, Nick Jones. As noted in most reviews, the result was a highly professional videogame in every department, and something that the Vivid Image team could be rightly proud of. "*First Samurai* is one of my favourite games that I was involved with, so it is very important indeed," remembers Mev fondly. "The whole team did an excellent job, including Raff, Teoman and John." While events surrounding *First Samurai* hampered its release back in the early Nineties, today it is regarded as one of the most technically accomplished and playable – if, ahem, slightly tough – games on the Commodore Amiga and beyond. *

**Our thanks to Raffaele Cecco, Mev Dinc and Teoman Irmak for their time. For more on *First Samurai*, the history of Vivid Image and Mev Dinc's own career, check out his fascinating autobiography, *Life Is A Game*.**

**"DURING TESTING WE'D GET THIS GLORIOUS ORCHESTRAL SOUND EVERY TIME THE SWORD REGISTERED A HIT"**

**TEOMAN IRMAK**

CLASSIC MOMENTS

# Batman Returns

» **PLATFORM:** MEGA-CD » **RELEASED:** 1993 » **DEVELOPER:** MALIBU INTERACTIVE

**For all of the promises made about how much of an upgrade your Mega-CD would be, most of the stuff you've seen so far is just a tad superficial.** Sure, seeing real video footage from a games console is impressive, but there was so much noise about how the add-on could top the SNES for rotation and scaling. Fortunately, when you pick up *Batman Returns*, he swoops in to the rescue as he so often rescues the citizens of Gotham City.

When you reach your first big enemy, you're finally convinced – this is what you bought your Mega-CD for. The undulating road is portrayed smoothly, but better than that is all of the sprite scaling going on. The detailed roadside buildings whizz by without obvious steps in detail, just like so many of the arcade racers you've loved, and the jack-in-the-box clown's head that springs towards you is exactly the kind of thing your Mega Drive never could have managed alone. Buyers remorse has been defeated – next up, the boss. *

## BIO

When tasked with bringing *Batman Returns* to the Mega-CD, Malibu Interactive could have just added some CD audio to the middling cartridge version of the game. That whole game was included, but totally overshadowed by the brand-new driving sections that took full advantage of the Mega-CD's ability to scale and rotate sprites. *Batman Returns* earned great scores from magazines including 90% from *Mean Machines Sega* and 85% from *Sega Power*, and later inspired the cartoon adaptation *The Adventures Of Batman And Robin* for Mega-CD, which removed the platform gameplay entirely to focus on car combat.

# MORE CLASSIC BATMAN RETURNS MOMENTS

## The Face Of Justice

There's something very cool about Batman as a character, and few games allowed you to get up close to him like *Batman Returns*. The stage introductions see him driving along, turning the rotating steering wheel, before dramatically zooming into the hero's face, giving you a good look at his stern, steely expression before action begins.

## Follow The Light

The third stage on the outskirts of the city is just as attractive as the first two, but it has some extra fun elements. Apart from the various barriers and traffic cones to smash through, the bat signal is being shone in the distance, giving a special sense of urgency to your efforts to defeat evil and return to the city.

## Into The Sewers

Driving is fun, but taking to the sewers in the preposterously named Batskiboat offers a different challenge. Rather than blowing up adversaries, your goal is to negotiate the tricky tunnels, weaving between pipes and performing amazing stunt jumps using the ramps that are inexplicably frequently found in the murky waste water underground.

## Outstanding Options

Most options screens are not particularly exciting, but this one shows some real care and attention. You're greeted as 'Mr Wayne' upon entering it and you can see Batman's gloved finger hovering over the buttons as you make your choices. Better yet, this is where you can turn off the rather mediocre platform gameplay and just stick to the driving.

# PlayStation Controller

» **PLATFORM:** PlayStation » **RELEASED:** 1994
» **COST:** £24.99 (launch), £20+ (today, boxed) £4+ (today, unboxed)

**On the face of it, Sony's PlayStation controller is a relatively modest elaboration on the ideas that were used by its erstwhile partner Nintendo.** Like the SNES controller, the PlayStation features a d-pad, two central function buttons and four face buttons arranged in a diamond shape. The way in which Sony's design develops upon it is the addition of a second set of shoulder buttons, and long handle grips. Beyond that, the face button labels used shapes rather than the letters or numbers of past systems, and the d-pad was split into four smaller segments.

Today we know the PlayStation controller as one of the most significant milestones in the evolution of the control pad. Both the two sets of shoulder buttons and the long grips have become standard features on controllers across platforms, and the triangle, circle, square and cross symbols are highly recognisable emblems of the PlayStation brand. Sony would use this controller as the basis for its analogue and Dual Shock controllers, which add the weighty rumble motors and analogue sticks that make for a truly modern feeling controller, and the DNA of the original controller can still be seen in the PlayStation 5's standard DualSense controller. ✱

## ESSENTIAL GAME
### Wip3out

This futuristic racer from Psygnosis is one of the very best games you can play on the PlayStation, with detailed environments whizzing by at an extremely fast pace as you battle for first place with rockets, quake disruptors and sheer racing skill. It's also a great example of how to employ all of the buttons on the PlayStation controller, with your right thumb handling acceleration and weapons on the face buttons, and fingers on the shoulder buttons for the directional air brakes, rear view and hyper thrust. Steering was also tuned for the d-pad, since not every player would have access to analogue controls.

## PlayStation Controller fact

- In a pinch, original PlayStation controllers can be used to play PlayStation 2 games, although the lack of analogue thumbsticks means that they are only useful for certain games.

SUPPLIED BY
**EVAN AMOS**

# THE MAKING OF FUTURE COP™ L.A.P.D.

## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**CYBERTIGER**
**SYSTEM:** PLAYSTATION, N64, GAME BOY COLOR
**YEAR:** 1999

**THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING (PICTURED)**
**SYSTEM:** PC, VARIOUS
**YEAR:** 2003

**DEAD SPACE**
**SYSTEM:** PC, PS3, XBOX 360
**YEAR:** 2008

## IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS

» **DEVELOPER:** REDWOOD SHORES

» **RELEASED:** 1998

» **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION / PC

» **GENRE:** THIRD-PERSON SHOOTER

# A DYSTOPIAN LA, GUN-TOTING POLICE FORCE AND TRANSFORMING MECHS CREATED ONE OF THE PLAYSTATION ERA'S MOST UNDERRATED TITLES. WE SPEAK TO TWO OF THE GAME'S KEY DESIGNERS ABOUT HOW HARD WORK, A CLEVER ENGINE AND THE ASHES OF THE STRIKE SERIES LED TO THE CREATION OF THIS ADORED CULT CLASSIC

**WORDS BY ADAM BARNES**

» [PlayStation] Every level had some kind of 'Crowd Control' moment, essentially opportunities to unload a hellstorm on numerous weak enemies.

**While it's not a game that made a massive impact in the gaming market, *Future Cop: LAPD* still definitely managed to make a splash in the hearts of those that played it.** Ask anyone that did play it what *Future Cop* was like and you'll need to cancel your appointments for the next hour as you endure a nostalgic rant.

This cult-like adoration comes in part from the game's lack of wider recognition, but there's an impressive game under the hood, too, thanks to a team within Electronic Arts that was all but set for the chopping block. "We were a small dev team at EA Games and so we were kind of a pimple on the butt of EA Sports that was making all the money," recalls Chris Crowell, one of the designers on *Future Cop: LAPD*. "The nice thing about this was that it gave us tremendous freedom because nobody was really paying a lot of attention to what we were doing, so we were kind of like this indie game studio almost inside the big EA structure."

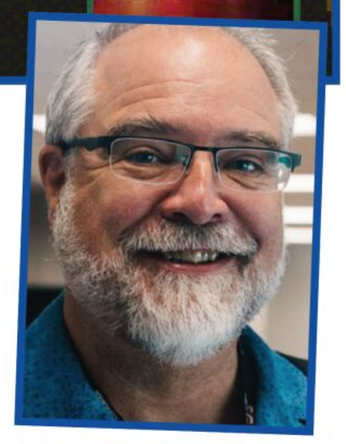
The team itself had previously been part of the EA tools group, a division that had been put to work reverse engineering Sega's cartridges for the Mega Drive that ultimately meant EA could manufacture its own cartridges and save a chunk in not paying Sega. When Sony came along and declared that only its tools would be allowed, precisely to put a stop to this sort of trickery, EA ultimately decided to close this department. "We had this little team and we had just finished working on the last 3DO game that EA made, *Shockwave II: Beyond the Gate*," says Chris. "We had finished that and we were looking for the next thing we were gonna do."

Those in the know might be familiar with the fact that *Future Cop: LAPD* began life as the next game in the *Strike* series, following on from *Nuclear Strike*. But, for some reason, Electronic Arts lost all interest in the idea of continuing with the *Strike* series, despite its popularity in the 16-bit era. "EA was transitioning into the blockbuster-only mentality," offers Chris as one reason that this decision had been made. "The last *Strike* game had sold well, but not well enough and so they said, 'Well, we're not going to do the *Strike* series any more – come up with something else.'" Some work had already been done on prototyping the initial *Strike* concept, and much like the game that would go on to become *Future Cop*, the early development did involve a transforming mech – except with a helicopter instead of a cop car.

» [PlayStation] The futuristic setting blended a mix of robots, cyborgs, mutants and crime lords – making for an eclectic mix of opponents.

"At first we knocked around some ideas," says Steve Nix, another of a handful of designers on the game. "One which was actually pretty cool was kind of like a wasteland explorer, almost *Mad Max* or *Fallout* in its design. You'd be rolling around in your mech, exploring and obviously having action, conflict and things like that. We worked on that for a bit until finally marketing said, 'We can sell cops, let's do a cop game – let's have that be the focus.'" The transforming mech automatically set the game in the far-flung future, and since the gameplay was focused largely on a run-and-gun style of play there needed to be a dramatic change to the world, "Cops were basically Judge Dredd as judge, jury and executioner at the same time," explains Steve. "The world is out of control, crime lords are one of the most powerful entities in the city, they don't respect the police so special units with mechs need to go in."

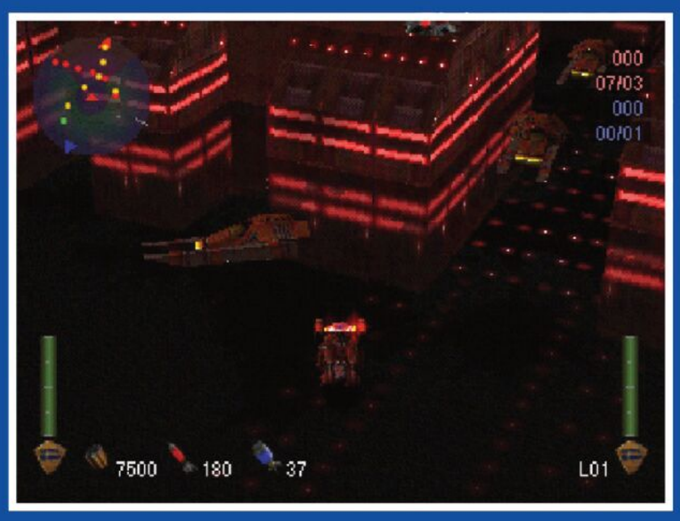
The team itself was located at EA Redwood Shores, so the decision to focus on purely an LA setting tied into the direct knowledge that they could bring to this futuristic, dystopian world. "We knew from working on the *Shockwave* series, which was all about defending Earth from alien invasions, that there was a lot of fun factor from having well-known locations under attack," continues Steve. ▶



CHRIS CROWELL

STEVE NIX

"WE WERE KIND OF A PIMPLE ON THE BUTT OF EA SPORTS THAT WAS MAKING ALL THE MONEY"
CHRIS CROWELL

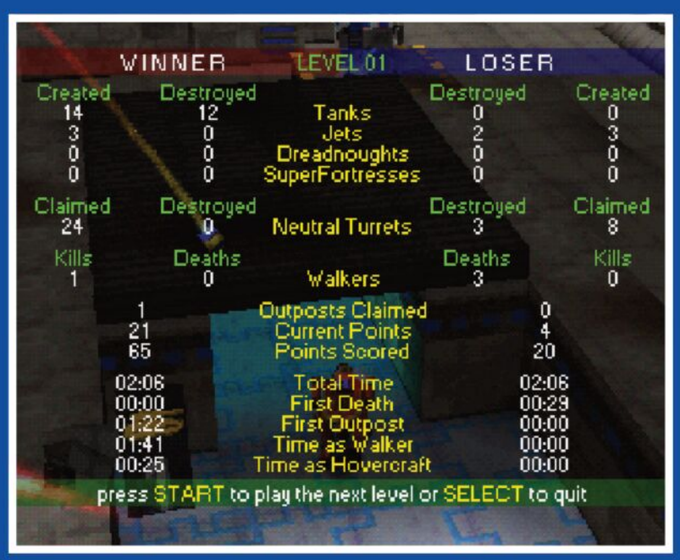



# MOBA BEFORE MOBA

THE UNEXPECTED MULTIPLAYER MODE THAT INSPIRED A GENRE

■ You might find the concept of discussing the term 'MOBA' to be scandalous within **Retro Gamer**. Even if *Defense Of The Ancients* – or *DOTA* as it became known – is already of drinking age, the term MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena) is a decidedly modern one. But while many point to *DOTA* as the genre's starting point, the truth is that *Future Cop: LAPD* got there first. "Precinct Assault was never part of the plan," explains Steve. "That was me, on a weekend, playing around with the editor and realising one vs many – which is basically what the core game is – is fun, but I was more of a tactical player, a strategic player, a battlefield type player. So I wanted to see if I could pull off something in the editor that felt like two sides of the battle going to war, and you are a major player in that battle."

That's where the idea for the automated units came from and the towers that would effectively handle the oncoming weaker units. This meant the more powerful players (or AI opposition) had to decide how and when to get involved, as they could break stalemates. Players could even kit themselves out with specific weapon sets, a precursor to the idea of unique heroes with specific skills. "It was fun," adds Chris. "In fact we ended our launch party that we had with a showdown between the QA team and the dev team."



» [PlayStation] Switching to ground-based combat allowed for the team to leverage the environment for fun combat moments.

» [PlayStation] The Griffith Park Observatory being used as a laser cannon was the first of the supervillain vibes that was created, and after that the wackiness just went off the charts.

▶ "So we got a map of LA and broke up the neighbourhoods, and a couple of the people on the team were from LA so they knew these interesting places." This resulted in a slew of "crazy comic-book villains" tied to these iconic locales as crime lords, and from there the rest just fell into place.

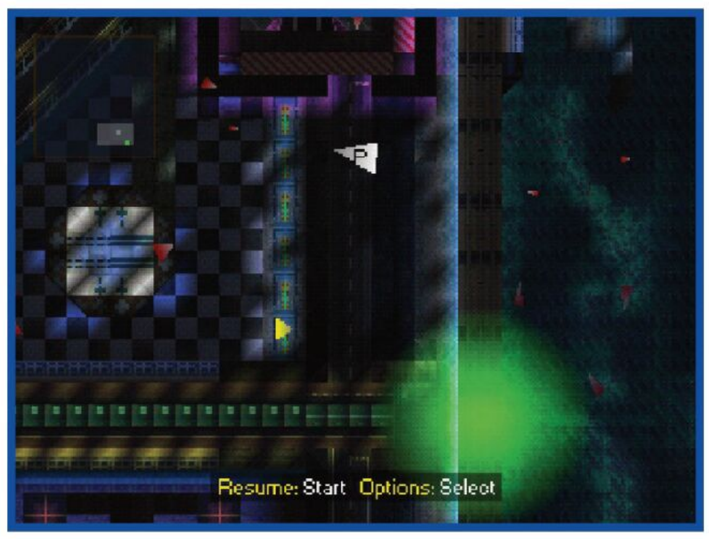
**The team was incredibly small for a PlayStation game from a big publisher like EA, but a large chunk of the work was handled by the engine itself.** Since the team had formed largely from the clever boffins at EA's tools group, the impressive engine that powered *Future Cop: LAPD* opened up possibilities to evolve the gameplay beyond what would have originally been a limited scope as a *Strike* game. "We had the engine technology from working on the *Shockwave* games that was able to have animated characters and lots of characters on the screen," says Chris. "It was a wonderful technology pipeline internally that allowed us to just try things out really rapidly, just rapid prototyping. It was a really slick scripting system and world building tool."

In fact this was the reason why *Future Cop*'s credits are primarily artists and engineers with the rest composed of level designers. With both the creative and technical aspects of *Future Cop: LAPD* more than adequately handled, it was up to the unusually large number of level designers with the powerful editor in their hands to bring the game to life. "The editor had a lot of engineering involved in terms of padding and some logic in terms of making events, their behaviour and when they would spawn and how they would appear," explains Steve. "And so at the beginning, the core game design was just a few individuals that were responsible for how the mech worked, how it moves, how it shoots, what its weapons set is, what are the enemy types. That design was fairly straightforward, and how you would exploit that in each level then became the individual designer's responsibility."

"IT MAKES MY HEART ACHE A BIT THAT WE DIDN'T GET A CHANCE TO DO A SEQUEL"
STEVE NIX

This wasn't just what led to the variety of the levels, either, since through the process of designing the levels, additional features or functions would come to get added into the game. This was largely down to the speed with which the engine could handle quick prototyping, as well as the impressive particle system it came with – which meant some pretty neat weaponry for the mech. In a way the game's development was more organic than anything else, since the team were mostly just "shooting from the hip" on gameplay ideas, as Chris puts it.

That didn't mean that the engine was free from restrictions, of course, this was still the PlayStation era and there were necessary limitations that came with that. "This certainly came up a lot of times in development," recalls Steve of some of the technical challenges. "Like, the number of enemies you could have on-screen, that was a big deal. There are these scenes that you encounter in the game called 'Crowd Control' and they zoom in, not only because that's a little bit more dramatic, but because they want to clip out a lot of the extra landscape geometry as we were going to have a lot of essentially mobile soldiers or crime lords or whatever you were fighting. To get them on-screen, we had to zoom in. And obviously with the perspective, we couldn't actually shift to something like a first-person view because it couldn't handle it, it couldn't render that much of the world." Steve adds that *Future Cop* probably only has five to




» [PlayStation] What is it about this generation of games and the awful ways of presenting maps?!

» [PlayStation] Each stage culminated in a battle with one of the crazy supervillain-esque crime lords, with this cult leader being particularly memorable.

» [PlayStation] The variety of weapons essentially came from the technically impressive particle system of the engine, which allowed for increasingly novel attack types.

» [PlayStation] The early prototype for *Future Strike* included the series staple enemy: tanks. That's likely the origin of their inclusion in this level, too.

six enemies really engaged with you at any one time, and the rest were a carefully constructed illusion. "There was a dedicated engineer just focused on that," he says. "The whole focus was just a theme park of carnage. The engineering is pretty sound in terms of the amount of stuff going on-screen, but it was just clever that you would only see a slice of it so that slice was always filled with stuff to shoot at and enemies to encounter."

**This tiny 'indie studio within EA' was working twelve to fifteen-hour days for six days a week to make something exceptional, because it was ultimately something that they loved.** They just wanted to "get their heads down and make something great", and that passion ended up showing in the final product, which was released in 1998 on PlayStation and PC. "All the evidence that we had was that it was very strong," says Chris, pointing to the rave reviews and adoring comments from anyone who played it. "We were probably a little bit naive because we were building something that we loved ourselves," he adds, "which means that it is going to be a niche of some kind. But smart action movies are a pretty successful blockbuster kind of a category, so I think if EA had known what to do with it, it could have turned into more of a franchise."

The problem was precisely that, however: EA *didn't* know what to do with it, it wasn't the blockbuster the publisher wanted and the marketing team wasn't quite as into it as the dev team. "The difference there was that we weren't really an indie, we were sort of an indie team in the big EA bubble so you have to hand the game off and let the powers that be do whatever they're going to do with it." Chris adds that the team were already seen as troublemakers internally, which likely didn't help matters. "We really raised a ruckus with the previous game, *Shockwave 2*, when it was so mishandled," explains Chris. "We were quite vocal. In fact, the leads on the team had sent an email off to Larry Probst, the CEO, and said, 'Why don't you just give us the money and we'll do the marketing.' That was not warmly received."

So despite its overall quality and renown among those that did play it, *Future Cop: LAPD* didn't reach a large enough audience to warrant a sequel. There's a sense that, in fact, *Future Cop: LAPD* could've become a real classic, rather than just the cult status it had to live with. EA just hadn't given it a fair shake. "It wasn't a very big print run," says Steve of the game's reportedly poor sales. "I'm pretty sure the entire print run sold, we just didn't make a lot. That was kind of a disappointment for the team when we learnt that." If EA had put a bit more money and effort behind it, the story of *Future Cop* could well have been a vastly different one. "It makes my heart ache a bit that we didn't get a chance to do a sequel," adds Steve. "But I'm happy that people still think about it even 20 years later. A lot of things I hear are, 'Man, I played the hell out of this as a kid,' and then nostalgia kicks in, and that makes me happy to know that I had changed someone's life in some small way by bringing them joy." ✱

» [PlayStation] The Precinct Assault mode was a completely new mode of multiplayer and if it had been released in an era of persistent online gaming, it might've been more widely recognised.

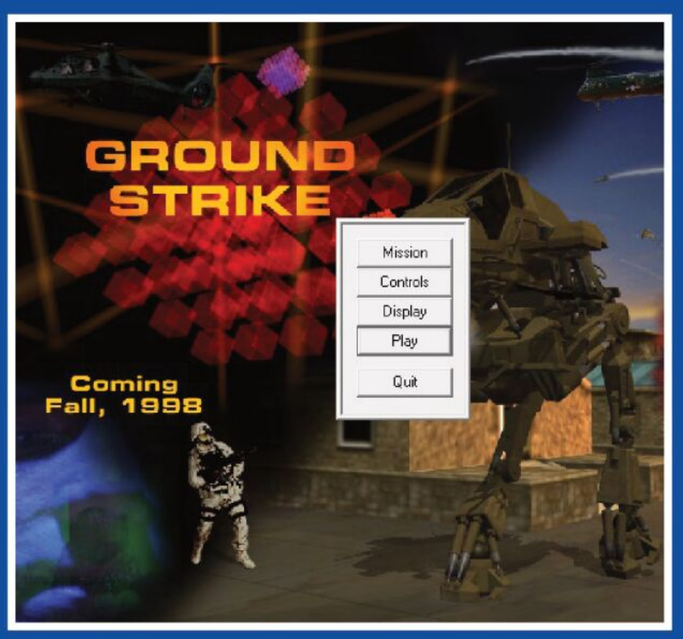
# THE STRIKE CONNECTION

## HOW FUTURE COP WAS NEARLY 'FUTURE STRIKE'

■ Perhaps we'll never know why EA suddenly decided to turn its back on one of its most popular 16-bit franchises, but back before *Future Cop: LAPD* was on the scene there was *Future Strike*. This was to be a sequel to *Nuclear Strike*, the game that would go on to be the last in the series. "In preparation for that, Eric [Holden, technical art director] had been working on this transforming robot that you would be able to pilot around and do the *Strike* mission kinds of things," explains Chris about the initial design of what was to be *Future Strike*.

"Certainly the story changed dramatically, the locale," says Steve of the first change to the game. "In *Future Strike* we were going to have a supervillain that was going to do something in the world and you would go to different sites around the world and engage in different bases that that supervillain had and then eventually confront them." The heritage of that can be seen in the wacky crime lords of *Future Cop: LAPD*, but in moving over to a tangible place like LA – as well as keeping things restrained to the ground instead of a helicopter – the play between the transforming mech also changed. "But the roles were pretty similar," Steve adds, "you transform into the car to quickly through a level or move from point A to point B in a different style and then switch over to the mech which was the most combat effective."

Whether the similarities can still be seen in the final product, the truth is that the team felt that without the limitations and expectations of the *Strike* brand, they could just focus on creating the very best game they could.



# Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2

## SMOKING RUINS

» PC » 2000 » WESTWOOD PACIFIC

**PC gaming wasn't a big part of my childhood, mostly because with my mum raising two kids on her own, we couldn't afford a computer.** That all changed in the summer of 2002, when I was going into my final year of secondary school and PC prices were coming down. Given the amount of time my sister and I spent online, my mum soon realised that getting broadband would free up the phone line and reduce our bills, so my online-gaming attention was drawn away from the rapidly declining Dreamcast scene. I'd regularly play games with friends from a *Sonic* forum, from *Doom II* to *Phantasy Star Online*. The best of the lot was *Red Alert 2* – so good in fact, that I barely actually touched the campaign missions. A large part of the fun was that we could have big games because there were quite a few of us that owned it, though I did annoy the other players because I was the only one without *Yuri's Revenge*. Still, I loved using Korea's awesome aircraft to deliver precision strikes on key enemy buildings.

To be honest, those sessions got me through a dark time because school was going terribly for me. By that point I was a special case and had been allowed to drop some classes, so during those free periods I could just walk home. During one of those breaks, a friend who also should have been at school was online for some reason, so we decided to have a quick one-on-one game that turned out to be especially memorable. Knowing my usual strategy, they had set up a ring of anti-aircraft missile launchers around their base. Undeterred, I noticed a small gap at the top of the map and manoeuvred my jets around it manually, click by click, and proceeded to demolish their sole construction yard. I revelled in the sheer panic that came through the text chat, but the euphoria didn't last. Not only did I eventually lose the battle, I learned that the stress had caused my friend to slip up on their attempt to quit smoking. Whoops! ✱

1275
POWER PLANT
ORE REFINERY
BARRACKS
WAR FACTORY
AIRFORCE COMMAND
NAVAL SHIPYARD

# DESIGN:

## THE CHAOTIC N64 YEARS THAT LED TO ROCKSTAR NORTH

**SCOTTISH DEVELOPER DMA DESIGN GOT APPOINTED TO NINTENDO'S 'DREAM TEAM' TO HELP LAUNCH THE NINTENDO 64. WHAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN A GOLDEN ERA FOR DMA ENDED UP A CREATIVE BUT VOLATILE ONE, LEADING TO TWO CULT CLASSIC GAMES, A LOT OF JOB LOSSES AND – EVENTUALLY – GRAND THEFT AUTO III**

**WORDS BY ROBERT ZAK**

**1998 was a golden year for the N64, showcasing the console's colourful creative spirit and distinguishing it from the more self-serious PlayStation.** It was the year when Link first scurried across a 3D Hyrule Field in *Ocarina Of Time*, when *Banjo-Kazooie* out-Marioed *Super Mario 64*, and when Turok really found his juju in his self-titled sequel. Nintendo cashed in on Poké-fever with *Pokémon Stadium* (and, err, *Hey You, Pikachu!*), while *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron* sealed the console's love-in with LucasArts.

But there were a couple more games that rounded off this vintage year. Critically acclaimed but commercially overlooked, DMA Design's *Body Harvest* and *Space Station Silicon Valley* were oddities – not quite fitting the kid-friendly N64 mould but not not fitting it either. Excited by the newly discovered freedoms of 3D graphics, DMA approached these games as toy-strewn playgrounds to experiment in. Those who worked on these titles say it's a miracle they ever came out, yet within them you can find the kernels of design that would eventually form into *Grand Theft Auto III*, and Rockstar North.

Following the success of *Hired Guns* and especially *Lemmings* in the early Nineties, DMA had established itself as a name developer, and

You like Kirby?
Have S'MORE.
Get ready for a saurgasbord of Kirby action. Kirby Super Star™ Eight tasty games in one! And this time the softie has an edge: Now he not only eats his enemies, he can take their powers (23 to be exact). In this world, you are who you eat. Chow down on a ninja and Kirby goes kung-fu fighting! He can even hook up the bad guys and use them as helpers. So prepare yourself. 'Cause this time, the marshmallow's doing the roasting.
Only for SUPER NINTENDO
Play it Loud.

» Nintendo's Play It Loud campaign ran from 1994 to 1996, and tried to nurture a more rebellious image for Nintendo. It seemed to fit with DMA's own punky image, but the studio would soon discover that beneath the adolescent-teen veneer of its marketing, Nintendo remained a deeply conservative company at heart. Perhaps more importantly, why is Kirby stuck inside a chocolate cracker? And why does the hand holding him have such grubby fingernails?

» DMA's design department was filled with references to the humour that inspired them (notice the *Dilbert* print?)

» [PC] DMA's 1993 first-person squad shooter *Hired Guns* was a key game in its resume before joining Nintendo's 'Dream Team'.

## "THERE WAS NO REAL STRUCTURE AT DMA"
### JAMIE BRYAN

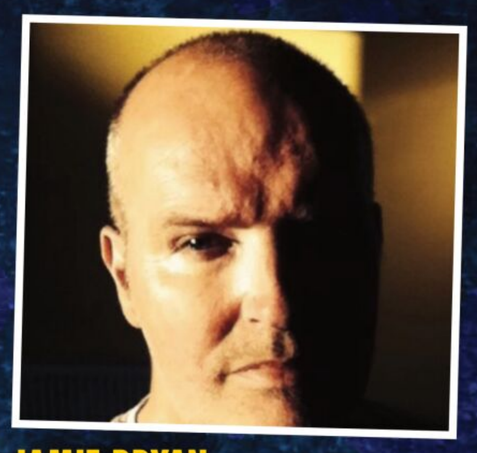
set out to get involved with Nintendo for Project Reality (which would later become the N64). DMA cofounder Steve Hammond says that DMA got Nintendo's attention by wooing them in 1994 with an FMV clip of *Star Wars* that they coded onto a SNES cartridge. "It was a case of Dave Jones trying to get their attention with a wee stunt which said, 'Look at us!' while cornering Nintendo at a trade show," Steve tells us.

**The stunt worked.** DMA was recruited to Nintendo's 'Dream Team', a roster of third-party developers – including Acclaim and Rareware – who'd get to work with Nintendo's Project Reality hardware well before the console's launch.

At the time, Nintendo was still in the midst of its Play It Loud marketing campaign – all graffiti scrawlings and loud colours to promote a rebellious backwards-cap image to compete with Sega's. DMA, the Scottish studio with decidedly punk stylings, seemed a perfect fit. But Nintendo got a whole lot more anarchy in the UK than it bargained for when it brought on the studio working out of a warehouse in Dundee.

"There was no real structure at DMA," says Jamie Bryan, *Space Station Silicon Valley* project leader (a role he admits was never that clear to him). "Notions like the design process didn't exist, and this was just before the internet as well." This freewheeling approach emanated from DMA cofounder Dave Jones, who was described as a visionary capable of inspiring the studio with game concepts even if they couldn't become a reality. "He was an advocate of, 'Don't worry about time, just make it good,'" Jamie recalls. "That was the beauty of DMA. No producers, no scheduling, just a bunch of people with an absolute love for making games."

*Body Harvest* was lined up as an N64 launch title. The first design documents, dating back to 1994, set it in a future inspired by Fifties America. It ▶

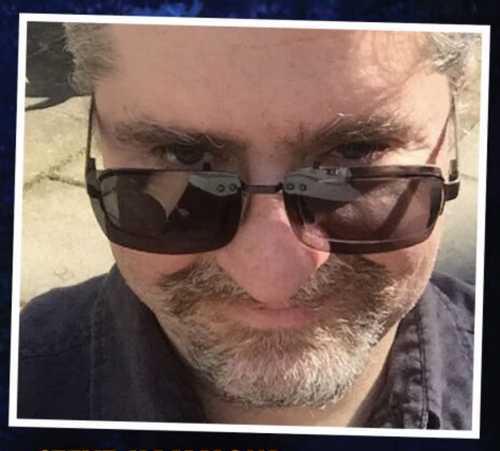


**JAMIE BRYAN**

■ After *Body Harvest*, Jamie would continue working with former DMA developers on various projects, including a rather excellent *Superman* game for iOS that he made with Tiger Games in 2011. He's currently setting up a WebAR games business alongside long-time friend Kirk Ewing.

**GARY PENN**

■ Former games journalist Gary Penn cofounded interactive TV and games company Denki in 2000 alongside four former DMA developers. The company released dozens of licensed cartoon tie-in games over the years, before moving onto its own IPs. Its most recent game is the popular block-based colony builder *Autonauts*.



**STEVE HAMMOND**

■ Steve also continued working with a few of his fellow former DMA colleagues, and is currently working with a couple of former DMA alumni on a new indie game. Last year, he entered the *NaNoWriMo* challenge to see if he could write a *Body Harvest* novel – based on the original premise – in a month. He completed two-thirds of it.

DMA DESIGN

# DMA'S GTA DNA

**DMA's ambitious Nintendo 64 games marked a transition from 2D to 3D for the studio, and in these surreal games we see the first inklings of *Grand Theft Auto III***

### GRAND THEFT AUTO

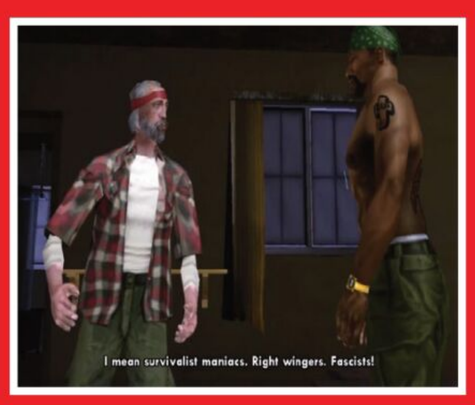
■ **OK, so arguably Adam Drake had implicit permission to use any car, tractor and tank he pleased given his mission is to save the world, but to be able to run around a 3D world and help yourself to vehicles was very *GTA*. In a way, so was murdering animals then riding their corpses around in Space Station *Silicon Valley*...**

### THE RIGHT TO RUN PEOPLE OVER

■ **If you wanted to steal cars and run people over in *Body Harvest*, you could. The hapless humans wandering the game world looked kind of like 3D paper cutouts, but their goofy screams and blood puddle after you run them over were pretty grisly to see.**

### GRAND THEFT ANIMAL

■ **The robustness of *Space Station Silicon Valley*'s toolset meant DMA designed a *GTA*-style city map within it, complete with vehicles and animals to run over. It gave the studio a glimpse of what a 3D *GTA* could be, and the rest is history...**




### SAN ANSPIRATION

■ **In a nod to its roots, the name of the first mission in *GTA: San Andreas* given to you by San Fierro hippie 'The Truth' was Body Harvest. Good to see CJ and the Grove Street Families paying respect to where they truly came from.**

» [N64] *Space Station Silicon Valley* was more expressive than *Body Harvest* in its art style and humour.

# LOST DMA

***Space Station Silicon Valley* and *Body Harvest* weren't the only projects DMA Design was working on during those heady years. Here are the most promising ones that never made it out the door**

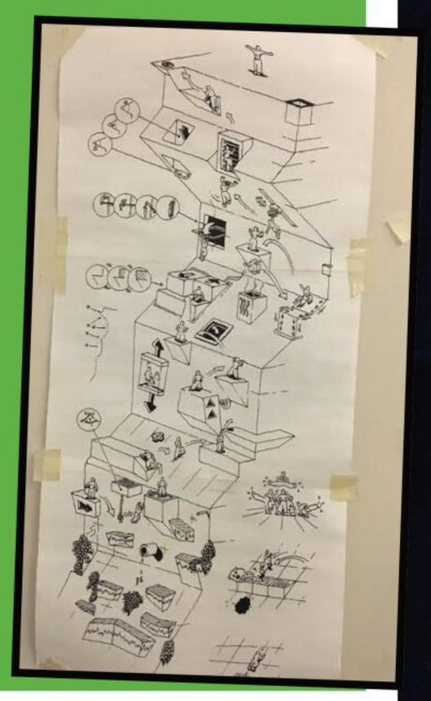
## CLAN WARS

■ **This real-time strategy game was to be made for DOS, but *Body Harvest* took priority. Set in medieval Scotland, this game didn't focus on collecting resources like in a typical RTS, but on building up a castle then doing battles. You built up a castle, then defended it against human or AI enemies. It was to be set in medieval Scotland, which no doubt appealed to the largely Scottish team at DMA.**

## GTA 64

■ **Ever since *Grand Theft Auto* was still sweetly known as *Race 'N' Chase*, the plan was always to release it for the N64. After *GTA* came out, work began on porting the PlayStation version over to N64, complete with improved graphics and extra levels. Alas, resources ended up going into a proper *GTA* sequel.**

## ZENITH



■ **During the overload years, DMA was working on a zany climbing racing game. You picked from a cast of superheroes who'd punch, kick and jump over each other to reach the top of the level. Looking at it today, it bears some resemblance to the 2011 cult classic *Catherine*, albeit with superheroes instead of a gawky unfaithful boyfriend beset by visions of his girlfriend's guilt demon.**

▶ was styled like a self-aware B-movie in the vein of *Them* and *Invaders From Mars*. To this day, Steve remains proud of his original tagline, 'They came to Meet Us. Greet Us. And EAT Us!' The action was to be instigated by the aliens killing the protagonist's dog, and the game would've concluded with the twist that humans end up eating the aliens.

Its tongue-in-cheek charms however, were lost on both Nintendo Of America and Nintendo Of Japan. The disagreements over story revealed an awkward three-way cultural tension; Japan wanted a simpler narrative in line with other Nintendo games, America wanted it to be more complex, while DMA was informed by distinctly British influences.

"British games always had a stream in surrealism and absurdist humour, and it's no coincidence that we were influenced by Chris Morris," Steve recalls. "Whenever a new episode of *The Day Today* was broadcast, we'd watch a tape of it in the conference room next lunchtime. With *Body Harvest*, culturally, no matter what we did someone was guaranteed to not get it." The uncanny-valley humour would be all but erased from *Body Harvest*, with the game ending up far more sober than originally intended.

Coming from a background of 2D games for MS-DOS and Amiga, it took DMA a little while to get to grips with the 3D power of the Ultra 64, as the N64 was known at the time. "To begin with, the main character of Adam Drake was rendered in sprites, not in 3D," Steve tells us. "It was only when the team saw *Blast Corps* that they realised 3D was not only possible but necessary if it wasn't to look old-fashioned."

**"THE FAXES [NINTENDO SENT] OVER WERE INCREDIBLY HARD TO DECIPHER. YOU JUST COULDN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT IT WAS THEY WANTED"**
GARY PENN

» [N64] The toybox approach to designing *Space Station Silicon Valley* resulted in one of the weirdest games on N64.

» Inside the *Body Harvest* department. Over on the right you can just glimpse a couple of heroes from the unfinished *Zenith* game.

**The vast distance between Kyoto and Dundee meant communication between Nintendo and DMA was mostly restricted to fax.** "They were actually very hands-off with the process," recalls producer Gary Penn. "The faxes they'd send over were incredibly hard to decipher. You just couldn't understand what it was they wanted."

DMA did manage to glean a little wisdom out of Nintendo's sporadic visits to Dundee. "Basically it was taking ideas and creating chains out of Post-it Notes, looking at the form of similar ideas and so on," says Jamie. "Nothing groundbreaking, just little things."

While DMA was wrestling with cryptic fax messages and Post-its to make *Body Harvest* work, another internal team got to work on *Space Station Silicon Valley*. Without the pressure of Nintendo as publisher, the design process was a little more relaxed. Early on the game was simply a playground of robust tools that allowed different systems to collide and things to be freely chopped and changed. Gary Penn describes it as, "An incredibly powerful but time-consuming way to do things."

This approach led to plenty of technical innovations that had little in-game use. Even before work started on *Grand Theft Auto 2*, *Space Station Silicon Valley*'s toybox gave the first glimmers into what a 3D *GTA* could look like. "We created a city map in the *Silicon Valley* engine, put some cars in, a couple of animals and called it *Grand Theft Animal*," Jamie remembers. "It was just a mess-about to see how it'd look on the N64, but it was still the first time we saw *GTA* in 3D."

At the same time, *Body Harvest* was transforming from a 'thin 3D *Defender*' game into something that tangibly felt like a proto-*GTA III*, with its open world and growing fleet of vehicles to ride around in.

DMA DESIGN

» [N64] Adam wasn't the most fleet-footed hero, so traversing levels on foot wasn't recommended.

» [N64] For a time-travelling supersoldier, Adam Drake was oddly dependent on stealing rudimentary weapons from locals.

» [N64] The distinctive abilities of each animal means there's always new things to explore in *Space Station Silicon Valley.*

» [N64] With its deadly beam capable of insta-frying insects, the Sun Shield elevated Adam Drake to superhero status.

» [N64] *Body Harvest*'s aliens usually fight naked, but sometimes they'll pop up in heavily-armoured robots.

**While the developers tinkered with their playsets, the business side of DMA was in trouble.** Funds from a $4 million publishing deal with BMG Interactive to make four games across four platforms each – *Space Station Silicon Valley*, *Tanktics*, *Race 'N' Chase* (which would become *GTA*), and a *Metal Gear Solid*-style stealth game called *Covert* – were running out as release deadlines passed by and the studio's 150 or so staff had to get paid. Doomed titles like the action climbing game *Zenith* and a *Kirby* spin-off called *Kid Kirby* were barely progressing, *Body Harvest* missed its designation as an N64 launch title in 1996, and *GTA* "was almost canned every week by the US division of BMG", according to Gary.

Then there were the scores of games DMA was taking on with no hope of completing them. "I was dealing with seven or eight games at the time. This was because DMA was running out of money and starting to sign games just for the signing bonuses to stay afloat," Gary says. "We had a great moment in mid-late-'96 when GT Interactive signed us, and we had to fake development teams on *Attack!* [a "weirdly *Pikmin*-like" game] and a Scottish Clan strategy game called *Clan Wars*. I think we had an artist and coder who never did anything before 'working' on *Attack!*, and no one on *Clan Wars*, so we had to get some guys on there." But these were all stopgaps, "trying to tread water fast enough to stay afloat", and DMA urgently needed to get games out the door.

The five-man *Body Harvest* team was struggling. Nintendo Of Japan had pared the game back to a fairly conventional time-travel story, but there was also pressure from Nintendo Of America that led to the game's hero Adam Drake going through multiple permutations. "We had Adam as an Eighties-style American action hero in the *Commando*/*Predator* mould," says Steve. "Then Nintendo Of America wanted him to be a secret agent with a tuxedo, then he was going to be a member of an ancient society called The Order Of Saint George, which was tasked with fighting alien dragons, then he was a time traveller."

It's almost as if the roulette stopped on 'time traveller' due to time constraints. With the time-travel movie *Twelve Monkeys* just out and *Terminator* ever-present in pop culture, Steve was concerned that the story would be too clichéd, but Nintendo saw it instead as "comfortingly familiar".

As the Play It Loud campaign drew to a close in 1996, DMA was learning that Nintendo remained a conservative company at heart, and the Dundee developer would have to adapt to the videogame goliath's cryptic demands. But DMA had to make it work, knowing that it could lead to a cosy long-term partnership with Nintendo like that enjoyed by its fellow Brit studio Rare. Aware of Nintendo's traditional approach to running a games company, DMA would give its in-house chaos a veneer of order whenever Nintendo visited. "There was once a prize for those with the 'Most Improved' appearance when Nintendo was visiting," recalls ▶

Steve. "I won it, got a Kit Kat as a reward, and braved a stinking cold to come in that day to see Nintendo. In the end, they stood inside the doorway of the design department for less than a minute, looked around as Dave said, 'This is the design department' and they buggered off again." It was so brief that Steve's still "not 100% certain" that he actually met Shigeru Miyamoto.

Something that may have left more of an impression on Miyamoto was one of DMA's retinue of "colourful characters", as Jamie Bryan calls them. "Miyamoto and his entourage were going across the car park, and a coder – Hairy Scary Jim we called him – was outside, smashing his head against the window over a piece of code not working, going 'Fuck! Shit! Piss! Shit!'" he recalls. "It was all pretty wild. You take a load of young guys, give them pretty good money, and a level of anarchy kind of rules." Jamie describes DMA as a boisterous games university, before correcting himself, "Actually, it was more of a school."

Despite tweaking *Body Harvest* and getting DMA to turn it into something of an open-world adventure, complete with indoor areas and side-missions dotted around sprawling (if sparse) levels, Nintendo still wasn't happy and had seen enough. It dropped the publishing deal with DMA in 1997. Low on funds and desperate to keep the studio alive, DMA entered a deal with established British publisher Gremlin Interactive.

"Gremlin and DMA weren't a great fit," Jamie says ruefully, before coming up with a more expletive-laden description of the Gremlin managers who'd give feedback on DMA's games. "Anybody who buys over a company and puts up an American-style portrait of him and his family, you just think, 'Who the fuck is that guy?'"

Gary Penn, who at this point was scrambling to get the spilled toybox that was *Space Station Silicon Valley* finished, was trying to mitigate the bureaucracy imposed by Gremlin. "They brought on production methods, Microsoft Projects, Gantt charts and all this other bullshit I had to deflect," he says, before admitting that, "Without their money, we'd have died earlier." Games were now being rushed to completion. Dave Jones' ethos of 'make it good, however long it takes' was replaced with 'that'll do'. Gary admits that time constraints meant *Space Station Silicon Valley* was "front-loaded with all the good stuff – there was a lot more complexity and richness upfront. It helped that the team were using repertoire, building and reusing things, and it's no surprise that the core of that team went to work on *GTA III*."

» [N64] Is it too tenuous to say that the firetruck missions in *GTA III* originated in *Body Harvest*?

**"BODY HARVEST OCCUPIES AN ODD PLACE FOR ME, BECAUSE I CAN'T SEE IT AS IT IS. LOOKING BACK, I REALISE THAT IT BROKE ME"**
STEVE HAMMOND

**Meanwhile, *Body Harvest* was somehow starting to take shape.** "The interior sections gave that perceptual contrast between outside and inside, which meant that the outside stuff didn't have to be so massive and so impressive technically," says Gary. "It's that illusion of life, that's one of the things we took from Nintendo. They didn't push us down this route, but left behind this obscure-looking panko that we had to try and make sense of."

Without Nintendo looming over the team, DMA could introduce some darker elements into the game. Little people populated the world – people you could shoot and run over, albeit with a penalty. Giant alien bugs would be pinching and feasting on these people around the vast levels, and you were under constant pressure to stop them before they munched too many. There was a brutality and intensity to the game which, in hindsight, was unimaginable as a first-party Nintendo game.

*Body Harvest* and *Space Station Silicon Valley* finally launched in September and October 1998. With marketing budgets of no more than £20-£30k each, both games sold poorly despite positive critical reception. In the dying years of the original DMA Design, these games were a fitting swansong for the company – offbeat, imaginative and ambitious. They would go on to be deservedly upheld as N64 cult classics. Steve admits that he struggles to reconcile the revered status of *Body Harvest* among fans with his own experience of making it. "*Body Harvest* occupies an odd place for me, because I can't see it as it is," he says. "Looking back, I realise that it broke me." When we ask whether he believes the game would have been better off without Nintendo as publisher, he responds frankly, "Yeah, absolutely. It would have been finished years earlier too."

Soon after releasing the games, DMA Design fragmented. Gremlin was bought by Infogrames in 1999, which then sold DMA Design and its assets to Take-Two Interactive, the new parent company of *GTA* and *Space Station Silicon Valley* publisher BMG Interactive. Take-Two assigned Dan and Sam Houser to run the newly founded Rockstar Games, while *Space Station Silicon Valley* developers Leslie Benzies, Aaron Garbut and Obbe Vermeij were among those who stayed on at DMA Design. Many DMA staff were let go during this time, with the remaining team getting to work on *Grand Theft Auto III*, before becoming Rockstar North in 2002.

We suggest to Gary Penn that DMA in the late-Nineties seemed to have the optimistic spirit of a modern-day indie studio – albeit blown up to an untenable size. "That's a good way to put it," says Gary. "It was kind of anachronistic, in some respects like the freeform development models of the Eighties, in others like today's indie scene."

Today, the *GTA* series has helped Rockstar Games nurture a somewhat rebellious image, but at this point it's little more than a corporate mirage cast by a company known for its relentless work ethos and troubling crunch culture. It was Rockstar's predecessor DMA Design that truly embodied the punk spirit: passionate and ambitious, disorderly and unsustainable. Jamie Bryan summarises it well, "I'm not mad enough to think that's how all businesses should operate, but it was an environment where creativity could flourish. That's got to be respected." ✱

DMA DESIGN

» [N64] Each level in *Body Harvest* was divided into chapters separated by a climactic boss battle.

» [N64] The 1950s USA level gives the best idea of what *Body Harvest* could have looked like before Nintendo insisted upon the time travel idea.

» [N64] The Greece level sees you protecting some rather cubic-looking World Heritage sites.

# MEET THE FLEET

We highlight some of the best vehicles to commandeer

### 1. RILEY 150

The trudging, near-slow-motion pace of *Body Harvest* makes the game's answer to a Harley-Davidson motorcycle almost feel safe to ride.

### 2. DAIMLER-BENZ PZ.KPFW. II

Put this knock-off Panzer tank to a more humanitarian purpose than its original creators by using it to save the world rather than conquer it.

### 3. MONSTER BUG

Look past the wheels, and you'll see that this is a blocky take on the car so beloved by eccentric aunties everywhere, the Volkswagen Beetle.

### 4. DUSTY

The Dusty is essentially a 1958 Plymouth Belvedere – the quintessential drive-in-movie-theatre hardtop to make out in the back of.

Image courtesy of Mike Dailly

### 5. SR SHADOW

One of the first cars in the game is actually based on one of the first ever commercial vehicles, the 1916 Pierce-Arrow. Surprisingly good for crushing bugs with its 38hp engine.

### 6. ZERO

Among the many planes you get to fly in *Body Harvest* is the Zero, which is based on the Japanese Mitsubishi fighter plane of the same name.

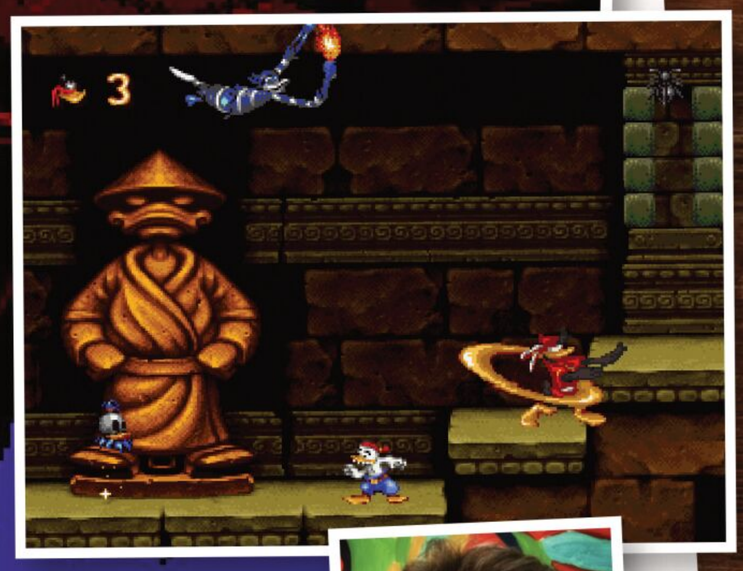
### 7. HUEY

You can fly America's (in)famous Vietnam helicopter. Given the weirdly yellow tint of the sky on the US level, we recommend flying it with *Ride Of The Valkyries* blaring for that full *Apocalypse Now* effect.

### 8. SPECTRE VTOL

You didn't have to wait until *GTA: San Andreas* to mess around in a vertical-take-off-landing fighter jet. There was one right here in Siberia.

# WHATEVER HAPPENED TO... GAMES THAT NEVER SAW THE LIGHT OF DAY



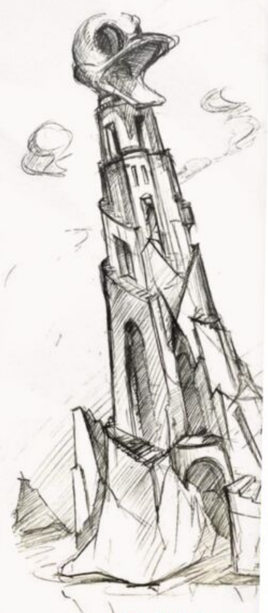


» Craig Allen



» Mat Sneap

» [PlayStation] Early demos of all available levels of *Maui 2* from the lost archive of programmer Jon Williams.



» The Lighthouse Of Thieves which opened the way to the surreal Lost City Of Dread. Concept art by John Fiorito.

# MAUI MALLARD 2

*If the release of the original Maui Mallard game was hamstrung by indecisive businessmen and marketers, then higher powers stood in the way of its sequel. Discover how Eurocom's ambitious follow-up was scuppered by an Olympian god*

Words by Max Nasikan

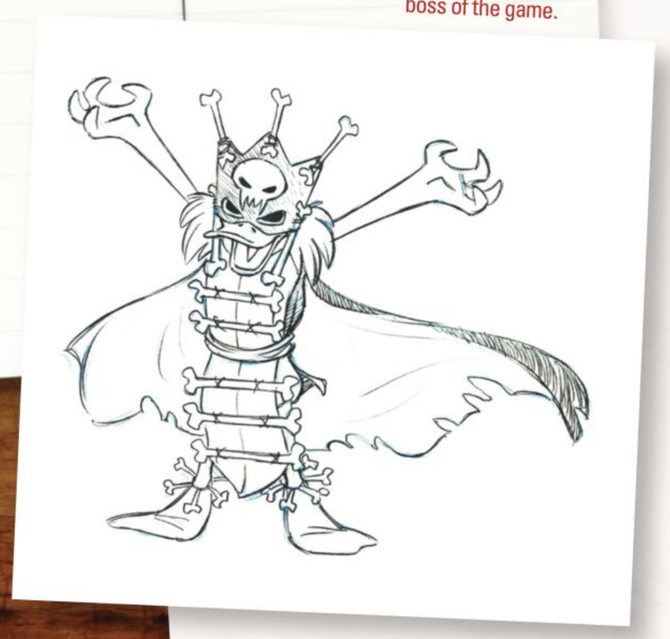
## IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** DISNEY INTERACTIVE

» **DEVELOPER:** EUROCOM

» **SYSTEM:** PLAYSTATION, SATURN

» **DUE FOR RELEASE:** NOVEMBER 1996



» One of three incarnations of The Evil Maui, who was supposed to be the final boss of the game.

***Maui Mallard*'s end credits teased the player with the phrase "Watch for Maui's next adventure".** Development of its sequel began in the summer of 1995, even before the final European build of the original Mega Drive game was created. *Maui 2* was planned as the first Disney Interactive project on next-gen consoles. It received the working title *Maui Mallard And The Lost City Of Dread* and was supposed to be released simultaneously on PlayStation and Sega Saturn at the end of 1996.

Development of the follow-up was entrusted to Eurocom, which had just ported *Maui* to SNES. Disney Interactive's team crafted the whole story together with the sequel's level concepts and switched to porting the original game to PC, entrusting the rest of the work to a British studio that already had experience developing games for next-gen consoles.

"After *Maui*, Disney asked us to develop *Maui 2* on PlayStation," explains Eurocom's cofounder and producer Mat Sneap. "We had a demo up and running, it was 2.5D. So simple 3D with lots of texture work to make it look like pixel art, but you were fixed to a limited depth in the screen. From what I can remember we'd started work on something like an aeroplane graveyard. Apart from that we'd just converted the SNES sprites over and were getting the mechanics working."

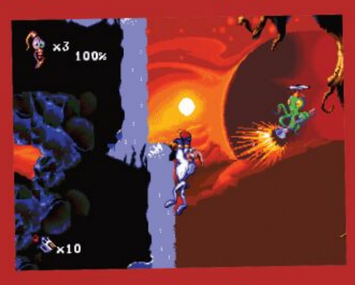
In February 1996, the final design document was ready with a brief description of all levels, as well as a detailed featurette script for the game's cutscenes. *Maui 2* was supposed to be full of cinematic scenes with character dialogues that could not fit into the original game due to the lack of memory. Going beyond 16 bits, the team wanted to unleash the potential of the PlayStation to the fullest. "*Maui 2* was going to be our first 'next generation' video game," recalls DI's senior producer Craig Allen. "And we were looking for ways to push the power of PlayStation, so leaning into dynamic environments: being able to melt ice to create new pathways and swapping gameplay elements in real-time."

Despite the variety of gameplay mechanics in the first game, the team added something new for the follow-up's gameplay. This is why Mucky was introduced, Maui's Muddrake sidekick who was going to accompany him for most parts of the adventure. To navigate hard to reach areas, the player had to switch between both characters in a similar way to *The Lost Vikings*. Animation, as well as

# MAUI MALLARD 2 ALTERNATIVES THAT DID HATCH

## EARTHWORM JIM 2
1995, SHINY ENTERTAINMENT

■ The original *Maui* game was Disney's answer to Shiny's game, but came out at the same time as its sequel. Jim's follow-up offered new gameplay ideas: from flying a rocket in an isometric view to changing the landscape of a level in real-time and proved to be a lot of fun.




## HERCULES
1997, EUROCOM

■ Looking at the gameplay of the game that emerged from the development of *Maui 2*, one can imagine how *Maui*'s sequel might have looked. The 2.5D screen rotation planned for *Maui 2*'s bosses became Hydra and Medusa boss battles, while levels featuring Maui's jeep and motorboat events turned into *Hercules*' running stages.

## EPIC MICKEY 2: THE POWER OF TWO
2012, JUNCTION POINT STUDIOS/BLITZ GAMES STUDIOS

■ Ironically, it was Mickey who was initially considered for the debut DI game, but he ended up in his own equally daring project only 15 years later. He acquired a spinning attack and the ability to shoot in a harmless way. In the sequel, Mickey also got Oswald The Lucky Rabbit as a sidekick.

» Ron Dias' elaborate concepts for *Maui 2* are easy to mistake for footage from an animated series.

» One can only guess what the finished animations of these characters created by Creative Capers were.

> "After Maui, Disney asked us to develop Maui 2 on PlayStation"
> **MAT SNEAP**

the creation of character concepts, were again entrusted to Creative Capers. "We had a design spec for the game with concept art, the tech demo which showed how we could use the power of PlayStation to bring 2D Maui into a 3D world, as well as character designs by Oliver Wade being animated at Creative Capers," continues Craig. "When we stopped production on *Maui 2* we had pretty much completed all the animation we needed to bring the characters to life and start building the game. So I think we had done about 6-8,000 frames of animation at that point."

*Maui*'s sequel was to consist of twenty-one stages, or ten basic levels in total. Pirates were joined by prehistoric ducks, sea monkeys and dead WWII marines. The action was still set on the Hawaiian island, but the new locations included snow-peaked mountains and a surreal world. "It started with Maui on a journey through the ice caves and culminated in a world of shadow and light with a lighthouse that was literally oscillating the world between two states, with Maui having to face his 'dark side' at the end of the game," recalls Craig.

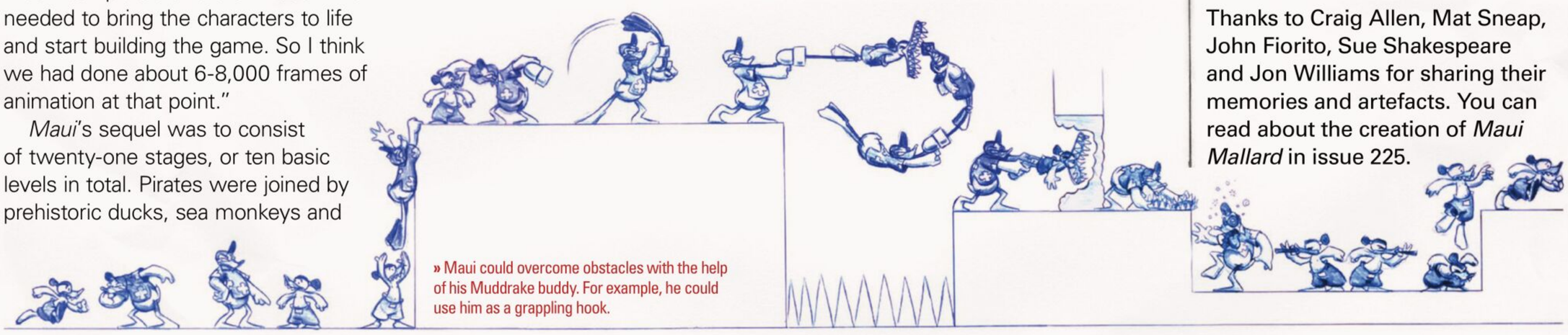
The creators weren't going to stop at two games. The *Maui* franchise was planned as a trilogy, and the end credits of the sequel, in turn, were supposed to promise the player *Maui Mallard 3: The Quackening*. [Great name – Ed] "I know we had plans to continue on and we wanted Maui to be like Indiana Jones with ongoing adventures," Craig continues. "It was a light reference to *Highlander 2: The Quickening* and we had a sketch of some sort of adventure where Maui meets other Mauis from other dimensions in a kind of contest where, 'In the end there can be only one.'"

In 1994, *The Lion King* stole six months of work from the *Maui* team. After two years, history repeated itself through the fault of another Disney heavyweight. But this time Maui was struck by a blow from which he could not recover. "This was going for a few months," recalls Mat. "We'd had a couple of visits from Disney management to look at progress. Then we had the call that Disney needed a game developed for *Hercules*. So that was that, *Maui 2* morphed into *Hercules*."

"The only reason why we were able to make the *Hercules* game day and date with the movie was by converting *Maui 2*'s preproduction and tech work into the basic framework for creating the *Hercules* game," explains Craig. "At the time, I was worried we would not be able to get *Maui 2* back on schedule if we switched to *Hercules*. But it was important to support the company's overall commitment to the future animated property, so we shifted gears with the intent of going back to continue production on *Maui 2* after the *Hercules* game was finished."

However, these plans were destined not to come true. "Much to my personal disappointment, after *Hercules* released, we were not able to gain support for going back to *Maui Mallard 2* despite the money that we had spent on prepping the production and being ready to go," sums up Craig. "This is why it was such a disappointment not to continue with production because we had done all the work to prepare everything to be a turnkey production, but alas. You never know! Maybe someday…" ✱

**Thanks to Craig Allen, Mat Sneap, John Fiorito, Sue Shakespeare and Jon Williams for sharing their memories and artefacts. You can read about the creation of *Maui Mallard* in issue 225.**



» Maui could overcome obstacles with the help of his Muddrake buddy. For example, he could use him as a grappling hook.

# PROJECT ZERO™

## MAIDEN OF BLACK WATER

**Twenty years since it first spooked the gaming world, the Project Zero series returns with a remaster of perhaps its most overlooked instalment. Series creators Makoto Shibata and Keisuke Kikuchi share how the Wii U inspired the most immersive and frightening entry yet**

WORDS BY ALAN WEN

» Series writer and director Makoto Shibata has said *Project Zero* is inspired by both his dreams and his own supernatural experiences.

» Series producer Keisuke Kikuchi who always envisioned making the scariest game possible.

» On close inspection, the Camera Obscura looks nothing like a Wii U gamepad, yet it feels the closest to holding one in your hands.

**Horror games have come a long way in the past two decades, but in their early years, the fear factor was often side by side if not secondary to empowering players with firepower to take down physical and visible threats.** *Resident Evil* went as far as diverting down an action-oriented path, even though it has more recently attempted to course-correct. By comparison, *Project Zero* was a breath of fresh air of the chilly kind when it arrived in 2001.

You weren't a trained soldier nor were you armed with a gun, not that bullets would be of any use against the supernatural. More importantly, while Japanese developers like Capcom and Konami were influenced by zombie and monster movies from Hollywood and American culture for the *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill* series respectively, Tecmo (since merging with *Dynasty Warriors* developer Koei to become Koei Tecmo) chose to take inspiration from Japanese culture, which coincided with the rising international popularity of J-horror cult classics like *Ringu* and *Ju-on: The Grudge* (and their Hollywood remakes), although the reason for the game's creation was more inspired by writer and director Makoto Shibata's own personal experiences with the paranormal.

But while you typically played a vulnerable Japanese school girl, this didn't mean running away and hiding from ghosts (as if you could even hide from spectres that pass through walls). The underlying mechanic in *Project Zero* – and how Tecmo's North American team came up with its North American title *Fatal Frame* – came from the Camera Obscura, a special antique camera that is your only means to survive against vengeful spirits by capturing them with its light and shutter, its power reserved for the ghosts that are closest in shot, just to make the experience all that more nerve-wracking.

In past *Project Zero* games, operating the Camera Obscura meant switching from a third-person to first-person perspective, but when it came to its fifth and most recent instalment, *Maiden Of Black Water*, the developers finally had a chance to make that even more terrifying. "We came up with the concept when we were able to test out the Wii U for the first time," series producer Keisuke Kikuchi and series creator Makoto Shibata tell us. "We realised how you could play the game and feel immersed by simply taking the

### IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** KOEI TECMO

» **DEVELOPER:** KOEI TECMO

» **RELEASE:** OUT NOW

» **PLATFORM:** WII U (2014), SWITCH, PC, PLAYSTATION 4, PLAYSTATION 5, XBOX ONE, XBOX SERIES X/S

» **GENRE:** SURVIVAL HORROR

"It really feels like the world of the dead"
KEISUKE KIKUCHI

» [WII U] The riskiest and most rewarding shot that can be taken with the Camera Obscura – the Fatal Frame – is of course the series' American name.

controller and pointing it at the world within your television. It was a really perfect platform for the *Project Zero* series."

The series had dabbled with motion controls in the past, including the Wii remake of *Crimson Butterfly* and *Mask Of The Lunar Eclipse*, the latter which was never officially localised outside of Japan, as well as the very brief AR-based spin off *Spirit Camera: The Cursed Memoir* on 3DS, with varied results. However, with the bulky Wii U gamepad in the player's hand, it actually did feel like you were holding the Camera Obscura with near 1:1 aim, turning it on its side in portrait mode for some tricky shots, or even turning around in complete 360-degrees to capture spirits from any direction.

**There was also more to it than simply holding the gamepad as a camera controller as it was still ultimately the second screen of the Wii U, the first screen being of course the TV.** "There is the world within the television, the player and then the gamepad that acts as an intermediary that ties the two together and contains a reflection of the world as well," Kikuchi explains. "It really feels like the world of the dead." One particular effect of having two screens simultaneously was that the audio could also create an immersive sense of realism so that as ghosts approached, you'd first hear them from the TV speakers before they gradually come through to the gamepad's speakers the closer they get to you.

This was the main impetus for creating a new game on Nintendo's console but Shibata and Kikuchi were also interested in incorporating a more active element to the overall story, which is about wanting to find things, in contrast to the 'passive' sense of taking pictures of ghosts. "As a result, we added in the setting of trying to find people who have gone missing by following the traces they left behind," they say.

The setting for this was Hikami Mountain, a place infamous for suicides and spiritual rituals connected to the shrine maidens who once resided there, of which one of the protagonists, Yuri, is a descendant of. Yuri has the gift of being able to find lost objects or missing people, bringing them back from the Shadow World. Through a request, she decides to journey up to Hikami to find a missing girl who may have gone to the mountain to commit suicide. "As you pursue the traces of the missing person's past, you can witness the last moments of their lives as you progress through the story," Shibata and Kikuchi explain. "We thought that the concept of potentially being able to stop a tragedy from occurring before it happens would be a key part of a dramatic story."

Besides Yuri, the story is also seen from two other perspectives whose paths overlap with one another: Ren, a friend of Yuri's who ventures up the mountain as part of research for his own book, and Miu, who's actually the daughter of *Project Zero*'s original protagonist Miku. While one of these is male, the focus on *Maiden Of Black Water*, including the titular Maiden herself, is once again on its female characters who, coupled with the ▶

» [Wii U] Upon defeating a ghost, you have a short window to reach out to them, triggering a found footage flashback to how they met their demise.

» [Wii U] The long black hair 'yurei' trope has existed in Japanese folklore but really became popularised by Sadako from J-horror classic *Ringu*.

### A TORTURED CAST
## YURI KOZUKATA

■ A young woman who's experienced sixth-sense visions from a young age after a tragic accident. Her powers can help her find lost objects or missing people, which she makes use of in the antiques store she lives and works at, although early on the store owner Hisoka mysteriously disappears.

» [Wii U] Although the protagonists have their own story arcs, they'll cross over with each other from time to time.

### A TORTURED CAST
## MIU HINASAKI

■ The daughter of *Project Zero*'s protagonist, Miu requests Hisoka to help find her mother's whereabouts only to wind up missing herself. She works as a gravure model (erotic model), which sparked controversy after a flashback where she poses in a revealing outfit was toned down in the Western release.

Wii U's graphical power and *Dead Or Alive 5*'s infamous Soft Engine, have noticeably sexier looks and attire compared to past heroines. Not that this was necessarily Shibata's priority.

"In this series, we intentionally set up the story so that the female protagonists all have similarities to the final boss ghosts," he explains. "The protagonists vicariously experience the tragic pasts of the ghosts, and gain a sense of empathy for them, and they have to purify them knowing their history. It's not a cathartic story where you eradicate a purely evil entity. It's a story where you bear a tragic past on your shoulders and you are going against fate, and ultimately the protagonist realises something very important to them from within themselves. One of the series' strong points is its ability to beautifully represent their emotional hardships and their slow approach to the world of the dead. I think this is a well-regarded point for the series."

> "I think that the distinct theme of Japanese horror, as well as being able to battle ghosts with the Camera Obscura are two elements not seen in other games"
> MAKOTO SHIBATA

**Another major theme in this game is of course water, which Shibata explains he has a personal reasoning for.** "Whenever I have seen a ghost, it is always in a place with some kind of water – I have never seen anything like that in more arid areas," he says. "When I interacted with a ghost in the past, the texture of it was like a soul made of steam. It was then that I came upon the thought that ghosts are a liquid that contain memories and emotions. Water is what connects the living with the dead. I felt this was related to the reason that humans are made up of mostly water, and I decided on having water be the main theme for the game."

Interestingly, this isn't the first time that Shibata has dabbled with a watery theme for the series revealing, *Project Zero 3: The Tormented* also utilised water as well, but it was within the larger theme of 'the pain of living'. "We did this so we could represent the motif of tears and the concept of wondering where water will eventually end up. For this title, we went with water as the main theme."

Mechanically, characters are safest from ghosts when they stay dry, though naturally that means there are situations where you're forced to wade into water. This is also a prime opportunity to exploit the wet effects on the characters' skin and clothes, a technique also taken from *Dead Or Alive 5*, which again raises questions on intent. There's of course one more link to Team Ninja's game, as *Maiden Of Black Water* includes a bonus chapter available after you've beaten the game where you play as purple-haired ninja Ayane, who was apparently suggested by Nintendo as a guest character.

"We also thought about including a part of the game in which the player could play through a section of the story without using the Camera Obscura," added Kikuchi. "I wanted to implement a character that would fit this role and also one that players not familiar with the *Project Zero* series would be familiar with." It's still an odd choice given that the ninja's martial prowess can't help her against malevolent spirits, instead she has to rely on a special flashlight to keep them at bay. Nonetheless, she's certainly a popular character from *Dead Or Alive* and, given her appearance in the *Ninja Gaiden* series, is also no stranger to crossovers.

Despite a graphical leap from previous entries, a control scheme that seemed a natural fit for the Wii U, and even a free downloadable demo (albeit weighing in at a hefty 16GB, making it impossible to play for those who owned the original base console with just 8GB internal

### A TORTURED CAST

#### REN HOJO

■ An author and friend of Yuri, whose research for his new book involving a custom involving burial photos leads him to explore Mount Hikami, much to his assistant's annoyance. He's also a descendant of Dr Kunihiko Asou, the inventor of the Camera Obscura, who also has a significant role in this game's events.

» [Wii U] Never mind the optional stuff, it's hard not to find the female characters' default outfits just a little inappropriate for the grim setting.

» [Switch] Photo Modes are practically the norm these days but if there really is a chance of being photobombed by ghosts, it'll be worth a try.

» [Switch] There are few signs that should make someone go 'nope' and turnaround right away than a room of creepy dolls.

storage), *Maiden Of Black Water* was not a success, and a late PEGI 18 release was never going to reverse the fortunes of an already ailing console. Nintendo as the publisher perhaps foresaw the low demand, given that the physical release was very limited – as the only physical version available was the slightly pricer limited edition, which now fetches exorbitant prices on eBay. Unfortunately, launching as an exclusive may have been the least of the game's worries as it also had a mixed critical reception, any graphical improvements and realism undercut by the woodenness of the characters, both in terms of movement and voice acting (the one consolation for the latter is that the game does include both English and Japanese audio).

**At the very least however, it makes sense for more players to give their verdict on *Maiden Of Black Water* by making it available on more platforms.** The series' approaching 20th anniversary then gave the developers the opportunity to "give back" to the community by not only remastering the game for Switch, which will have the option to play in the original Camera Obscura control system in handheld mode, but also for other platforms, which will also prove a relief for those who want to play without the motion control-based gimmicks, even if that was how the game had been designed.

This sadly doesn't mean a brand-new *Project Zero* is in the works, which would have surely been a better way to celebrate a milestone anniversary. Nonetheless, in a Famitsu interview, Kikuchi also expressed his hope that a sequel could be greenlit in the future, depending on how well *Maiden Of Black Water*'s re-release fares, and with a decision to release on multiple platforms across the last and current generation, you'd certainly hope this gives it a better chance.

"I think that the distinct theme of Japanese horror, as well as being able to battle ghosts with the Camera Obscura are two elements not seen in other games," says Shibata as he looks back on *Project Zero*'s 20-year history and what has made it one of the more unique brands of horror games that still lingers in your mind afterwards. Certainly, *New Pokémon Snap* and *Umurangi Generation* are making photography-based games trendy in different ways, so we can but hope there'll be an appetite for more shutter-based horror. After all, the thought of a next-gen *Project Zero* is already making us shiver. ✱

## ENHANCING THE HORROR

### DIPPING INTO THE ADDITIONS FOR THIS BEAUTIFUL REMASTER

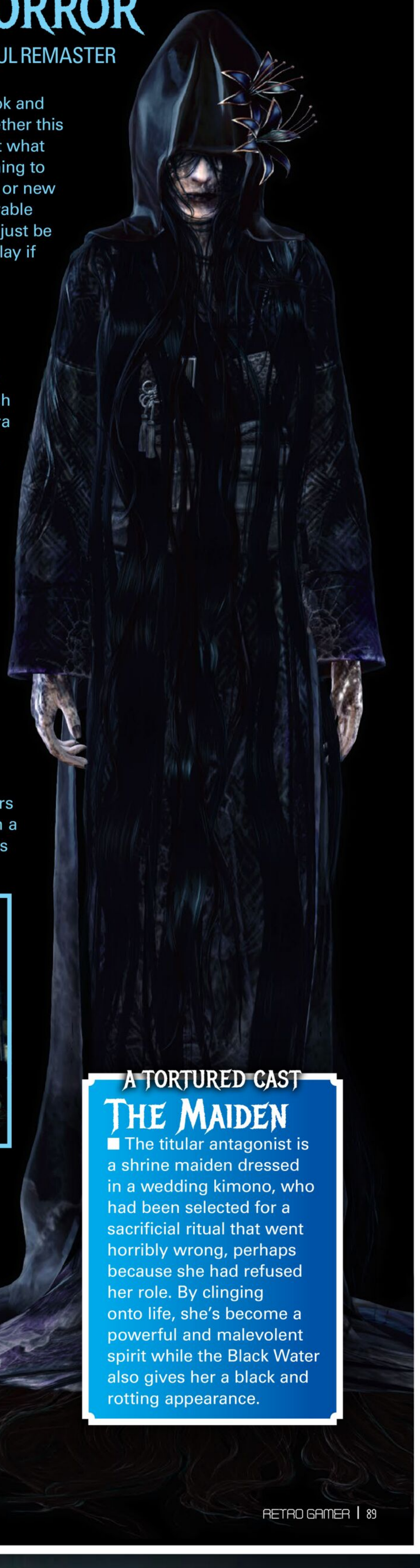
While we should expect *Maiden Of Black Water* to look and run better than on Wii U, it's not been confirmed whether this will include 4K and 60FPS on the latest platforms. But what else will this remaster offer? For those who are returning to Mount Hikami, don't expect new story-based content or new mechanics, other than the fact that it will now be playable with traditional stick and button controls, while it will just be Switch owners who get closest to the original gameplay if they want to play in handheld mode.

When we spoke to Kikuchi about new additions for the remaster he revealed that, "We have added in a photo mode, new costumes and an expanded list of ghosts that can be utilised in-game." He also confirmed the accuracy of playing *Maiden Of Black Water* on Switch, revealing, "You can use the Switch in handheld mode and use it as the Camera Obscura when playing the game."

So how does this new Photo Mode work? Rather than controlling the Camera Obscura, you can freeze the action then pose both characters and enemies in frame to take snapshots to share on social media – but who knows, perhaps you'll accidentally capture a scene with a ghost in the shot? This mode would also go neatly together with the aforementioned new costumes made especially for the remaster, including a DLC outfit based on Koei Tecmo's adorable alchemist Reisalin Stout from the *Atelier Ryza* series. Controversially, the racey outfits from the original Japanese release will not be returning nor will the replacement Princess Zelda and Zero Suit Samus outfits, since the remaster is no longer Nintendo-exclusive. It's sure to rile up parts of the fanbase hoping for a 'definitive' release, while others might question the point of covering up bikinis with a practically transparent wet T-Shirt. Interestingly, this time the costumes are the same internationally.

» [Switch] Coming into contact with water is a bad idea, even if you're a kick-ass ninja fighter like Ayane.

» [Switch] Besides featuring in a non-playable role, you'll be able to dress up as original protagonist Miku Hinasaki based on her outfit from the third game.



### A TORTURED CAST

### THE MAIDEN

■ The titular antagonist is a shrine maiden dressed in a wedding kimono, who had been selected for a sacrificial ritual that went horribly wrong, perhaps because she had refused her role. By clinging onto life, she's become a powerful and malevolent spirit while the Black Water also gives her a black and rotting appearance.

# Future Classic

## Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come

OLD!
THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES
retro GAMER
GOLDEN AXE: THE REVENGE OF DEATH ADDER
THE EVOLUTION OF TAU CETI
ZOMBIES ATE MY NEIGHBORS
WE EXAMINE EVERY ASPECT OF KONAMI'S GRUESOME BLASTER
Guacamelee! 2
THE MAKING OF NARC
ELUSIVE JARVIS RETURNS TO HIS VIOLENT ARCADE HIT
MASTER SYSTEM GEMS TO COLLECT
THE KEY TITLES TO BUILD AND EXPAND YOUR COLLECTION
ASTRO CITY MINI HANDS-ON
IS VELKA'S LATEST MINI WORTH IMPORTING?
ISSUE 207

### Info

- **System:** Switch, various
- **Year:** 2018
- **Publisher:** Drinkbox Studios
- **Developer:** Drinkbox Studios
- **Key People:** Graham Smith, Ryan MacLean

### Go Deeper

» Based out of Toronto, developer Drinkbox Studios first garnered attention with its charming puzzle platformer *Tales From Space: About A Blob*. It's unfortunately left stranded on PlayStation 3 as an exclusive.

» *Guacamelee! 2* is grander in scope in almost every way, featuring twice as many enemy types as the original, alongside additional chicken combat and a map that is much larger.

» [Switch] Most enemy encounters always happen in closed-off spaces, encouraging you to get experimental with Juan's combos and unique grapples.

***Day Of The Dead meets superheroic wrestling action in this different kind of Metroidvania with a fondness for all things Mexico. Here's how Guacamelee!'s comedically colourful sequel excelled by being different and rewriting the genre rule book.***

Words by Aaron Potter

# GUACAMELEE! 2

## THE BACKGROUND

If there is such a thing as difficult second album syndrome, Drinkbox Studios hasn't heard of it. *Guacamelee! 2* is proof enough of that. A sequel to the original 2013 Mexico-tinged Metroidvania released early on during the genre's indie boom, Juan's follow-up journey is full of just as much life, vibrancy and humour – only now with a far grander scope. Before diving straight into the next entry, however, Drinkbox chose to refresh its development palette by doing something unexpected: make a PlayStation Vita exclusive. *Severed* was a solid experiment as far as dungeon-based first-person slashers go, but luckily the five-year wait for *Guacamelee! 2* was worth it.

Having gotten exclusively into bed with PlayStation for a simultaneous release on PS3 and Vita previously, it was a genuine surprise to see Drinkbox drop both platforms in favour of PS4 and PC at launch this time. The console climate had changed a lot between the first *Guacamelee!* and this second go-around after all. Plus, the decision meant that a wider audience would now get to enjoy the Metroidvania exploits of a superhero luchador. This was the series' time to shine!

## THE GAME

*Guacamelee! 2* is very much a refinement of all the ideas laid down in the original. A good thing, too, because going against the traditional Metroidvania grain is exactly what made it stand out. You still play as a superpowered Mexican wrestler saving the world. The wise mythical goat helping to guide you throughout returns. And the surprising emphasis on narrative also makes a welcome comeback. These are all traits history has seemingly taught us shouldn't work in a genre primarily known for mystery, interconnectedness and back-and-forth exploration. Here though it does, thanks to how confident and funny the world and characters of *Guacamelee! 2* come across. Both of which just so happen to be backed up by great dynamic gameplay.

Unlike most other Metroidvania adventures, Juan boasts a complete lack of ranged attacks and instead must rely on his wrestling manoeuvres. His Rooster Uppercut satisfyingly sends enemies up into the air with a single punch, while the aptly named Frog Slam sees him able to decimate clusters of foes from above. Abilities like these alone would be enough to

» [Switch] Transforming into a chicken comes in handy when wanting to reach tight spaces, but also in scenarios where you want to stay nimble.

» [Switch] *Guacamelee! 2* touts a vibrant aesthetic anyway, but each boss is introduced with their own versus screen to help it feel like a main event.

» [Switch] Juan being able to jump between different timelines and realities allowed Drinkbox to sprinkle in references to other popular games. Not just Metroidvanias.

» [Switch] This sequel features twice the amount of enemy variety seen in the first. Flying foes, for instance, encourage you to deploy air-based attacks.

## Things of note

### MIMICKING METROID

Parody plays a huge part into the humour, with Drinkbox's game riffing on familiar sights from other games. For instance, powers are obtained from Chozo-like statues.

### PARTNERED PLAYERS

*Guacamelee! 2* introduces four-player play, letting you and friends run through the gamut of platforming challenges in colourfully chaotic drop-in/drop-out co-op.

### RETIRED DAD

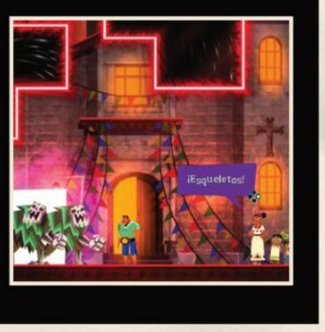
Juan's second adventure picks up seven years after the original. He's got the girl, had kids and is bent out of shape (unlike most game heroes).

### SKILL UP

Improving Juan's wrestling moves and other abilities requires coins, and for you to complete certain in-game challenges. Each enhancement is split into one of five categories.

### SHIFTING REALITIES

It's not only walls, floors and environments that pop in and out when realities shift. Enemies can exist across the two planes, too, bringing complexity to combat.




make your mission to save the Mexiverse a blast, but the genius is in how Drinkbox also makes them the method to move forward. Each special move is colour coded, you see, and just as decently as Juan's Dashing Derpderp skill will punch through an opponent's shield, it also is key to breaking any blue blocks blocking your path.

It may sound simple, but this idea is emblematic of *Guacamelee! 2*'s intention to never make you feel lost. Instead it's about empowering your sense of fight and, of course, exploration. Because, in addition to these melee skills and the incredibly addictive grappling mechanic that sees you tossing fools in any desired direction, platforming puzzles eventually come at you thick and fast. The gimmick this time, though, is that Juan has travelled to the darkest timeline in order to save his own, leading to creative sequences where you're constantly switching between the two worlds and the available environment changes around you. A simple wall jump may have worked to help reach your desired objective before, until suddenly you must do so while timing the reality shifts perfectly. In anyone else's hands an idea like this could become overwhelming.

It's a blessing, then, that Drinkbox Studios takes its time to integrate these systems and layer them on top of one another slowly, ultimately leading the way for you to think like a skilled superhero perhaps would. Such complex design ideas even bleed into *Guacamelee! 2*'s brand of comedy, as the first game's chicken transforming has been greatly expanded. Whereas before Juan's feathery form was a substitute for Samus Aran's Morph Ball ability, now you can do battle and solve platforming puzzles, too. This form even comes with its own gamut of special manoeuvres, including the Pollo Shot that sees you dart into the air diagonally.

The road to 100% completion in *Guacamelee! 2* is a tough one. Not only does it require a mastery of both the human and chicken skills you've learned up to that point, but also the patience necessary to work out what each platforming challenge demands of you exactly. Managing rifts, colour-coded obstacles, and awkward enemy placement all at once is tricky. Thankfully, such end-game scenarios are only there for the hardcore. Everyone else can sit back and enjoy a zany tale full of leaping luchadores and secret chicken societies.

## WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

*Guacamelee! 2* stands apart from the glut of other indie Metroidvanias released each week, no doubt due to its unwillingness to conform to conventional genre standards and have fun with both its gameplay and zany premise. It's a light-hearted attack on the senses that will never leave you mystified within its colourful world, instead offering a near perfect mix of combat, platforming and exploration that is just challenging enough without dipping into teeth-grinding territory. It's brightly bold in its execution, too, so much so that venturing through the Mexiverse in search of new skills and power-ups is never a bore.

It's appropriate that *Guacamelee! 2*'s credits lists every Drinkbox team member's role simply as 'luchador', as the finished product is equally as heroic as Juan himself. This is still one of the best modern Metroidvanias three years on, surely earning it the Future Classic status. ✱

> "I got a phone call from Midway telling me to give Pac-Man an eye, lipstick and hair!"
>
> Steve Golson

In the chair with...

# STEVE GOLSON

## From hacking Missile Command to giving Pac-Man a makeover, Steve Golson tells us about his pioneering arcade days and the insides of the Atari 7800

Words by Paul Drury

Halfway through our marathon two-and-a-half-hour Zoom conversation, Steve says excitedly, "Let me show you it," and disappears off screen. He returns a few minutes later with a box full of computer print outs and scribbled notes and sketches. It's all the paperwork for *Super Missile Attack* from 1981, the hack of *Missile Command* he and his MIT buddies produced, which laid the foundations for GCC, creators of *Ms Pac-Man* and the Atari 7800 hardware. He grins as he flicks through the pages, stopping to read out handwritten annotations or point out key aspects of the code, and you realise that though his time in the videogame business was short, his passion for it is enduring. We could have talked all night.

**Steve, we saw you on the Netflix documentary *High Score*. Were you surprised to be featured?**
I was a little but then it's a really fun story: college dropouts produce biggest selling coin-op in American history!

**Has anyone come up to you on the street and said, 'Hey, I saw you on TV!'**
[Laughs] No, but then I haven't been out much, what with the pandemic! I have been contacted by old high school friends that saw me on TV, saying, 'Steve, I had no idea you did *Ms Pac-Man*!'

**You attended MIT, the birthplace of *Spacewar!*, which is usually credited as being the first 'proper' videogame, yet you studied earth sciences. How did you get into the brave new world of coin-op gaming?**
Just dumb luck. By chance, I ended up living in a dormitory with Doug Macrae and Kevin Curran. They were a year behind me at MIT so this would be 1977. They created a partnership to put pinball machines in our dorm and I got involved helping them with that really early on. When the two of them moved off campus to a house in Brookline, I started helping more, collecting the money from the coin box and making sure the machines were working. I remember saying to them what a great operation they had going. It was a gold mine!

**Had you much experience with computer technology given that your degree wasn't actually in engineering?**
I took a class called introduction to electronics and that one class determined my whole career [laughs]. The class was for people who weren't studying electrical engineering or computer science. I really enjoyed it so I took another class in digital logic… and I was good at it. I started thinking, 'If only I had known how much fun this was, I would have done this, not earth sciences.' Kevin, who was studying electrical engineering, was in the same class and we ended up working a lot together so when he and Doug set up GCC [General Computer Corp], he knew I could do hardware design. I was one of their first employees, kind of like a 'founding member'.

**GCC went beyond just operating coin-ops across campus and actually produced a kit for Atari's *Missile Command* to change how the game played. That is quite a leap.**
There were companies making and selling these 'enhancement' or 'speed up' kits to arcade owners. It wasn't a novel thing. What we brought that was new was the level of sophistication. Instead of doing simple hardware changes that speeded the game up, or very simple software changes that increased the number of attackers by just altering a few bytes, we wanted to rewrite the software to really change how the game played. No one had done that before.

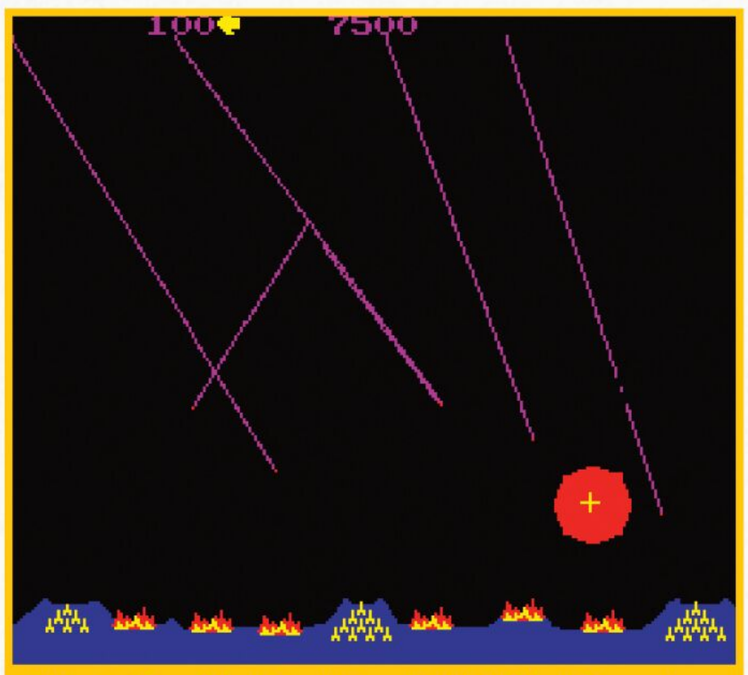
**So why focus on *Missile Command*?**
Because Kevin and Doug owned three of them [chuckles]. They had done really well at MIT but this was 1981 and takings were trailing off. They had bought kits previously for *Asteroids* and *Galaxian* but no one had made one for *Missile Command*. So they thought, 'Why don't we do it?'

**How did you go about accessing the *Missile Command* code so you could start altering it?**
We used what was called a 'microprocessor emulator system' made by GenRad. It looked like a personal computer: you had a screen, a keyboard and a floppy disk drive but then coming out the back of it was this big ribbon cable which can plug into a microprocessor socket. This is for people designing anything with a microprocessor in it. Could be a microwave oven! We wheeled in a *Missile Command* cabinet, plugged in this cable gizmo and now you can play the game but at any point you could stop the game and look at the code. It displayed 6502 assembler on the screen and we would type the code into a TRS 80 [computer] and from there we could play around with it.

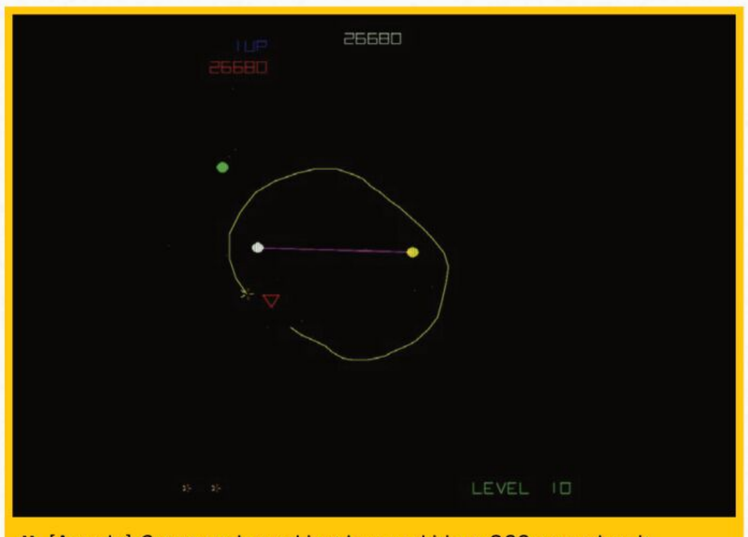
## SELECTED TIMELINE

- **SUPER MISSILE ATTACK** [1981] ARCADE
- **MS PAC-MAN** [1982] ARCADE
- **FOOD FIGHT** [1983] ARCADE
- **JR PAC-MAN** [1983] ARCADE
- **QUANTUM** [1983] ARCADE
- **ATARI 7800** [1984] CONSOLE

» The GCC rec room with Paul Moody 'relaxing' with *Robotron: 2084*. Great games, great shorts. We miss the Eighties.

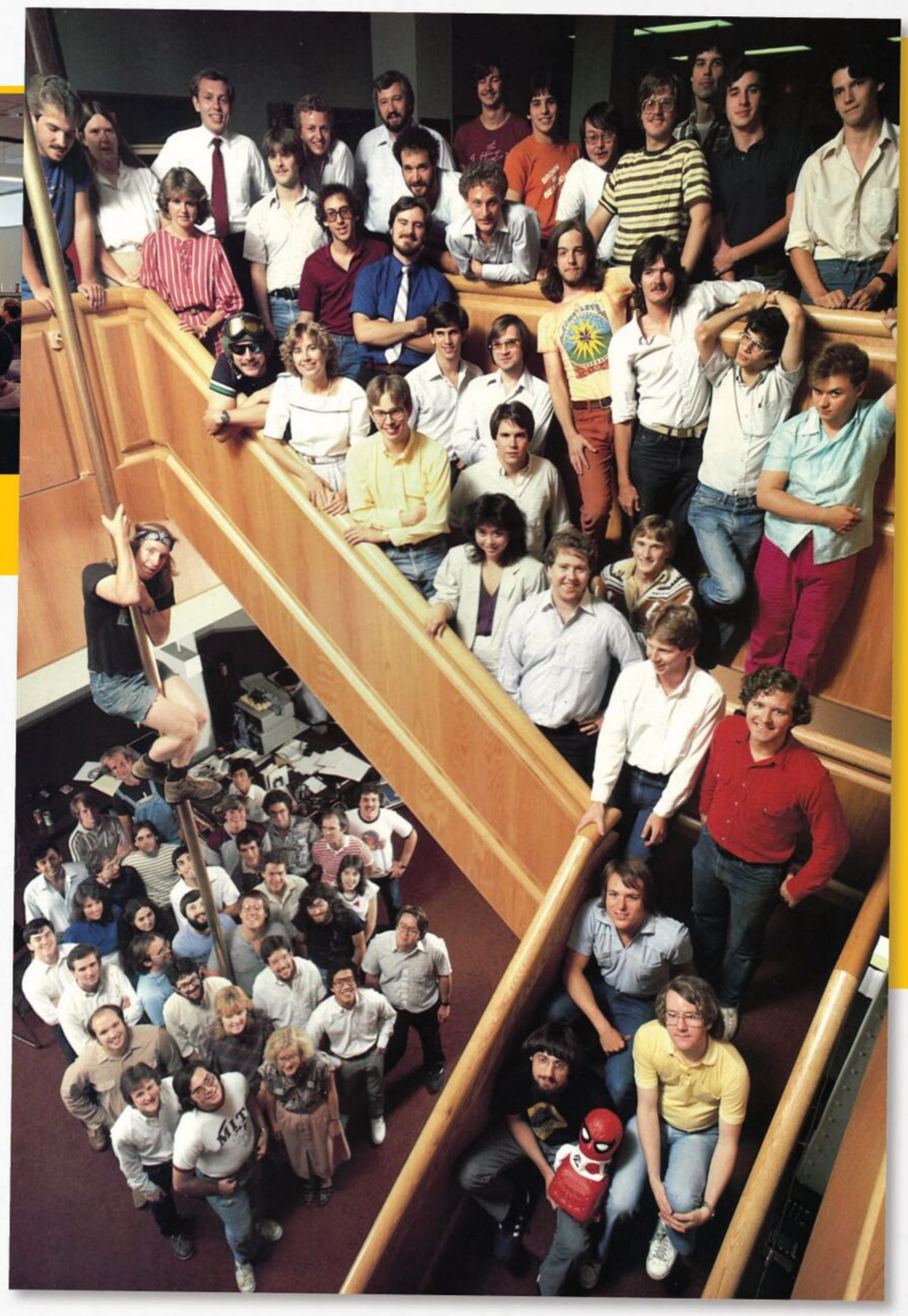



» [Arcade] *Super Missile Attack*: if you didn't think *Missile Command* was hard enough…




» [Arcade] *Quantum* showed just how ambitious GCC was when it came to creating original arcade titles.

» Any office with a fireman's pole has to be a fun place to work… GCC founder Kevin Curran addresses his team (Steve is at the back near the stairs).



» The GCC team pose around the fireman's pole, August 1983. Steve is in the yellow shirt at the bottom of the stairs, next to Spider-Man.

**You produced *Super Missile Attack*, which enhances the sound and colour of the original and introduces a new enemy, the UFO, but the main thing your kit does is make the game really hard…**
Yeah, it's actually too hard! Even the 'easy' setting is pretty difficult and the 'hard' setting is darn near unplayable but that's kind of the point. We didn't want people playing it for hours – just a few minutes and you're done.

***Super Missile Attack* was released in 1981 and sells really well – around a thousand kits at $295 each, which is a lot of money for college kids to be making. You all drop out of MIT to focus on the business full-time… but then the mighty Atari threatens to sue GCC! Were you all shitting yourselves?**
Nah. We had thought about the legal aspects and knew there were copyright issues but we felt we'd dealt with those. Plus, what's the worst that could happen? We didn't really have any assets so if we lost, maybe we'd have to go back to school. Gee, that's not so bad.

**Surely you were infringing Atari's intellectual property rights?**
Oh, there's no way we could get away with it today but back then, no one knew whether you could copyright the way the screen looked. It was interactive, between the machine and the player, and different every time. It wasn't like a movie or music that was the same every time you played it. And we wrote our own code. We didn't copy anything. The way Doug explained it was imagine you'd bought a book someone had written, then we come along and sell you bits of paper to paste over sentences in the book you own to change the story a bit. Remember, our kit only worked if you'd bought an original *Missile Command* cabinet. That sounds legal, right?

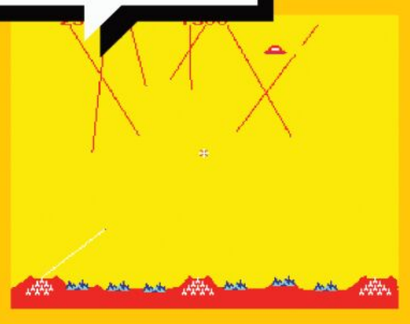
**Very clever! So the lawsuit went your way?**
Not initially. We were served an injunction and had to stop making and selling our *Super Missile Attack* kits but we managed to get that restricted to the version available then… we could produce a new version that addressed Atari's issues and bring that back to court. We annoyed Atari's lawyers because this was a Friday and we joked we could have it ready by Monday. That's how fast we worked.

**At what point did Atari drop the suit?**
It took a few months. They could see we were fighting them and that was costing them money and time. We were deposing their engineers to give evidence in court and that was not only annoying them, it was starting to undercut some of their arguments. For example, Atari's attorneys said they had a trademark on the very distinctive way the three *Missile Command* fire buttons are laid out but we asked one of their engineers why they were like that and he said it was because that's how your fingers are! You can't trademark something that is functional. We were whittling away at their case and, you know, they really were impressed technically with what we'd done with our game.

**Instead of fighting you, Atari decided to offer you a contract to make arcade games for them.**
Skip Paul, general counsel at Atari, said, 'Let's work something out'. They really were worried about losing the case. If they had, it meant it would have been legal for an end user to modify their software. They really didn't want a legal precedent being set.

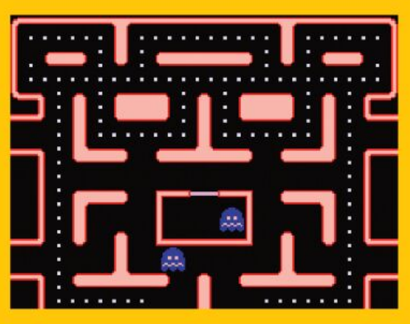
**While this legal case is going on, you have been working on your next kit, this time for *Pac-Man*. Why choose that game?**
We thought about doing a kit for *Asteroids* but one

# FIVE TO PLAY Steve's finest from his GCC days



## SUPER MISSILE ATTACK
**1981, Arcade**

■ This ingenious *Missile Command* mod adds a new enemy, the evil UFO, which can zap your cities from a distance, whilst upping the overall difficulty to insane levels. Tony Temple's *Missile Command* tournament world record is 4.4 million. His high score on this is 350K. Prepare to be schooled.



## MS PAC-MAN
**1982, Arcade**

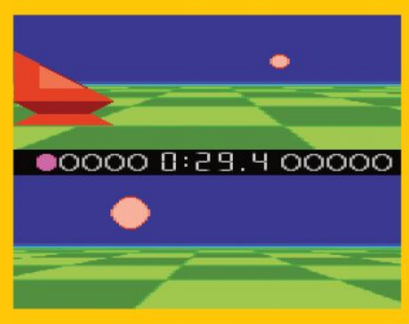
■ The hack that evolved into a phenomenon. It's not just that the game introduces new maze layouts and a randomness that means memorising patterns is not enough for really high scores, the female lead and story elements hinted at in the cutscenes laid the foundations for the all-conquering franchise.

## FOOD FIGHT
**1983, Arcade**

■ *The Three Stooges* meet *Robotron: 2084* in a frantic dash for ice cream. Along with the rather excellent *Quantum*, *Food Fight* shows just how imaginative GCC were when it came to creating unique arcade experiences that were hard to stop playing. You can read the full story of its creation in issue 135.

## JR PAC-MAN
**1983, Arcade**

■ Following up the best-selling coin-op in US history was always going to be a big ask and at least this tries to shake up the formula and do something different. The playfield now scrolls horizontally, there are seven different mazes to master and the young Pac-lad has a ghostly love interest. It'll never work.




## BALLBLAZER
**1987, Atari 7800**

■ Though Steve didn't work directly on GCC's cartridge releases for Atari's home consoles, his work on the 7800 hardware, especially the Maria chip, powered some fine titles for the machine. We're big fans of this excellent, proto-*Rocket League*, two-player game, and it's one of Steve's favourites, too.

of Doug's friends pointed out *Pac-Man*, which was just starting to get big in America in 1981. It was also obvious what needed to be fixed with the game. It was predictable! You could play these patterns… people started to play the game for hours and books came out teaching players how to master it. It needed some randomness.

**You change the way the ghosts look, you give *Pac-Man* legs and you call your game *Crazy Otto*. Why did you do all that?**
In the *Super Missile Attack* court case, one of Atari's more convincing arguments was that we hadn't changed the characters – the aeroplane, the bases, the satellite all looked the same. So with *Pac-Man*, we knew we needed to change the characters. The bonus fruits we thought were generic enough to keep… as long as we got rid of things like the *Galaxian*, which was obviously owned by Namco!

**This time, you contact Midway, who had licensed the game from Namco in Japan, up front and they are very positive about your modifications… though they suggest some of their own.**
Initially they wanted to call it *Super Pac-Man*, which made total sense as the marketing for *Pac-Man* was huge. They liked our new monsters and were going to keep them but then decided to go back to the original ghosts. And then they said we should make the main character female.

**Did you think that was a good idea?**
I did not! Stan Jarocki at Midway, who is still alive and bright as anything in his nineties now, phoned me up and told me to give her an eye, lipstick and hair! I mean, in *Crazy Otto* there was a cutscene with a female character and a baby so the story was there. I said, 'Really? You think teenage boys are going to like that?' He said, 'Oh yeah, it's going to be a huge hit. Women love *Pac-Man* and they will love having a female character.'

**In retrospect, do you think the transition to a female lead was key to the game's success?**
I've never really thought how important it was but you know, it made this new, distinct character. You could now have this whole family story going on in the cutscenes. It expanded the whole world of *Pac-Man*.

> "We must have made about $10 million from Midway. Then as the years went on, we made way more than that from Namco"
> Steve Golson

**We note you called her Ms rather than Miss or Mrs. Was this a nod to the Women's Liberation Movement of the time?**
[Laughs] I'd love to take credit for that, like we were so far ahead of our time but truthfully there was a sequence of names. It was going to be Pac-Woman then Miss Pac-Man was suggested until someone pointed out she had a baby. An unmarried game character having a child? We can't do that! We couldn't have Mrs because at the start of the game, she's not married. It was Mike Horowitz's wife Eileen who said it should be Ms Pac-Man so we pushed that.

**It seems incredible that anyone could be outraged at a game character having a child out of videogame wedlock.**
But people were outraged by videogames. There was all this panic about the violence in games and kids being corrupted so it was a concern. *Pac-Man* wasn't violent so we didn't want to screw it up.

**You didn't screw it up and *Ms Pac-Man* was a huge success, selling 114,000 cabinets in the Eighties, retailing at around $2,400, which means over a quarter of a billion dollars in revenue. Did GCC get a decent piece of the pie?**
From the original arcade game we did for Midway, we must have made about $10 million. Then as the years went on, we made way more than that from Namco.

**Flush with money and success and a contract with Atari to make arcade games, you must have started recruiting people?**
At first, we just recruited our friends, people we knew, people we used to work with, people we knew from MIT… all word of mouth. We got office space in Kendall Square and moved in during the fall of 1981, just ten of us at first. We had a bunch of discussions about what the hardware [for the arcade] should be. What processor should we use and what will the graphics hardware look like? We didn't want to use the cheesy old 6502 processor Atari had been using. We were going to pick the spiffy new amazing Motorola 68000 and our graphics hardware wouldn't just move six sprites around, we were going to have 48!

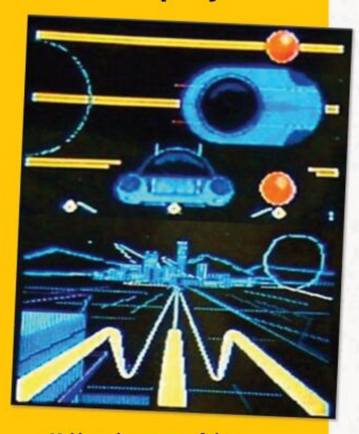
**What was your role?**
I started on the playfield design in 1982 and it was gonna be a fancy, scrolling playfield. Though the first game it got used in was *Food Fight*, which didn't need scrolling – so it was taken out for that game and we called it the 'vanilla playfield'.

***Food Fight* does feature vanilla ice cream quite prominently, in fact.**
It's a really fun game to play. Fun was a word

## LASER... FAIL

### Steve on GCC's failed laser disc project

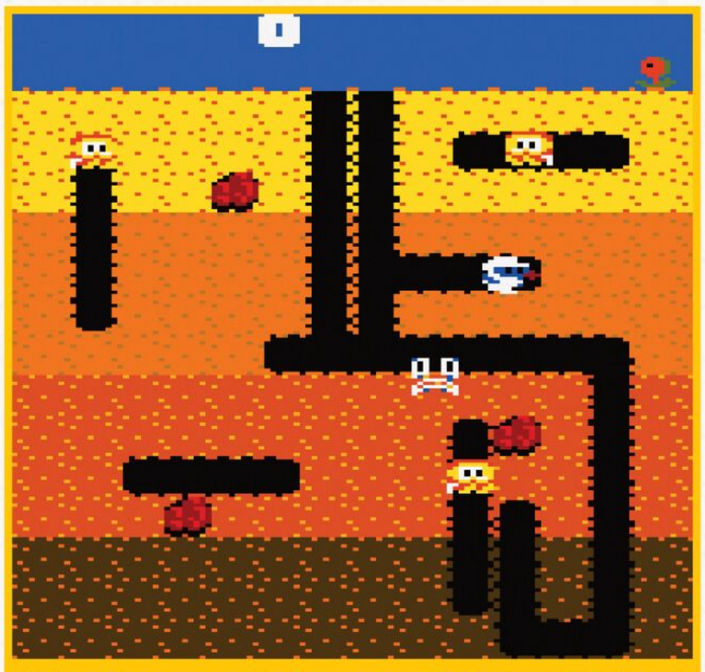
"This was our laser disc experiment," says Steve of *LaserRail*, one of many unreleased arcade titles developed at GCC. "*Dragon's Lair* used cartoon [imagery] but our idea was to have computer generated images on the laser disc so it kind of looked the same as the graphics being overlaid on top. We were actually talking to movie houses that did CGI to give us what we needed. We had produced all the storyboards: you land on an abandoned planet and the alien civilisation had a transport system, these three trails of light like a track. You're riding in this car which can jump from rail to rail and there are branching routes… it combined exploring these ruined cities with lots of things to discover and a shoot-'em-up [aspect]. We really thought it would be fun though looking back I'm not sure it would work in an arcade environment and once Atari stopped paying our bills in 1984, everything stopped." GCC artist Paul Moody, who originally proposed *LaserRail*, has kindly shared his concept art and screenshots of this intriguing unreleased title.



» Here is some of the original concept art drawn by Paul Moody of the unreleased *LaserRail*.

images © Paul Moody

» This screen grab shows the expansive alien planet players could explore in *LaserRail*.



» [Atari 7800] Darran was delighted to discover GCC converted *Dig Dug* to home consoles but not *Mr Do!*. [Can you drop this now Drury – Ed]

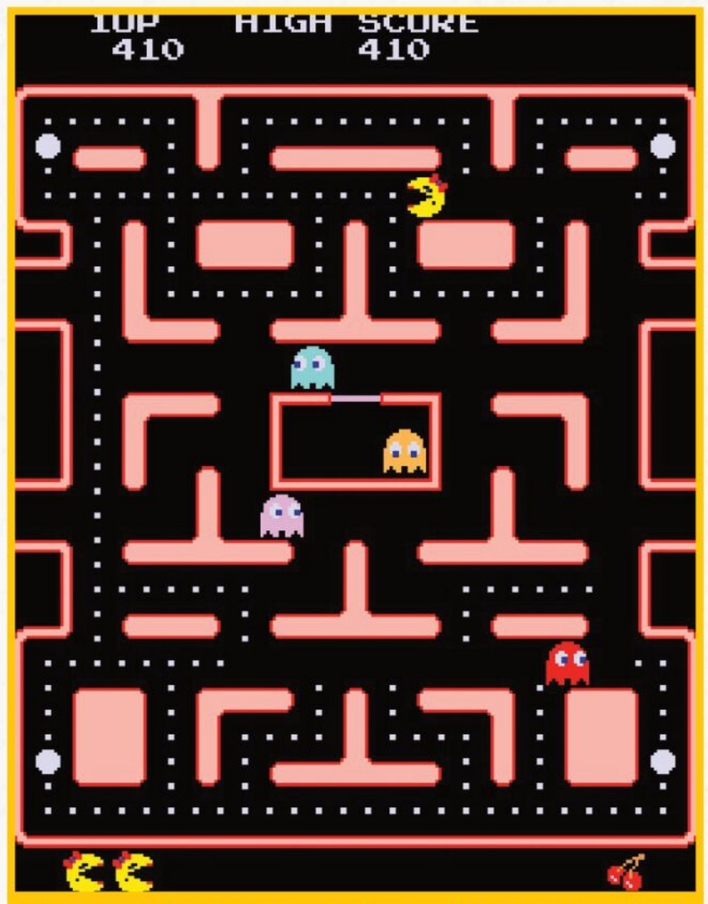
we used a lot at GCC. That was the whole point. Our labs were open plan and you could walk around seeing the games people were working on. We'd say, 'Hey is your game fun yet?' They'd be like, 'Nah, not yet.' 'OK, keep working on it till it is…'

**Along with *Food Fight*, GCC also produced the beautiful *Quantum* for the arcade. At what point did you diversify into developing games for the home market?**

You have to go back to April 1982. Atari released *Pac-Man* for the 2600, which was hugely hyped. Then people played it and it sucked. It flickers and it plays nothing like the arcade game. It was a public relations disaster. What is Atari going to do? Their top developers have left to form Activision and Imagic and those that remained were demoralised. Then someone must have thought, 'Hey what about those guys we have over in Cambridge? Could they help?' It was only about a week after *Pac-Man* was released that Kevin [Curran] got a call from Manny Gerard [CEO of Warner] asking us to do games for the 2600. I only put those two things together years later.

**So suddenly GCC are developing games for Atari's home consoles.**

They worked out a deal on the phone and the money




» [Arcade] *Ms Pac-Man*: the game Monica from *Friends* spent her childhood playing. Surely that should have been *Food Fight*?

» [Atari 2600] GCC's version of *Ms Pac-Man* on the 2600 made you wish they'd handled the original *Pac-Man* port as well.

> "Old high school friends that saw me on TV have got in touch, saying, 'Steve, I had no idea you did Ms Pac-Man!'"
> Steve Golson

arrived the same day! Like, half a million dollars. We got a list of seven games, like *Phoenix*, *Centipede* and *Ms Pac-Man*, of course, and they needed them by September, so they could have them out for Christmas '82. We hired more people, got them done in time and looked like wonder kids. We saved Atari's bacon that year!

**Was it then a logical step to develop an actual console for Atari?**

You have to go back to 1982. I attended a four-week class in California to learn about chip design, organised by VLSI Technology Inc. The message was that anyone could design a custom chip. GCC bought a VAX computer and I started teaching the rest of the company [what I had learned]. By that Christmas, we all had the custom chip virus! We can do chip design – awesome! What can we design? How about our own computer-console?

**Was this what became the Atari 7800?**

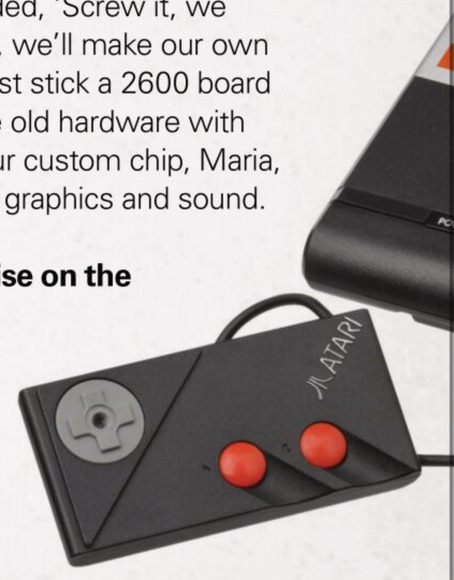
No, we called it Spring and this was a totally different project. It was X86-based, would be PC compatible and you could sell it as a computer or as a games console. By the spring of 1983, we had made progress but then Atari said, 'Listen, the Atari 5200 is a disaster. What can you do to help?' That was the beginning of what became the 7800. Initially, we actually called it the 3600 because it was like the 2600 plus and we kept both projects going for a while but then the 7800 became such a massive project. It became far more interesting and we started to include ideas from Spring into the 7800, like it having a keyboard and being a computer, too.

**Did you consider making this new console a 16-bit machine?**

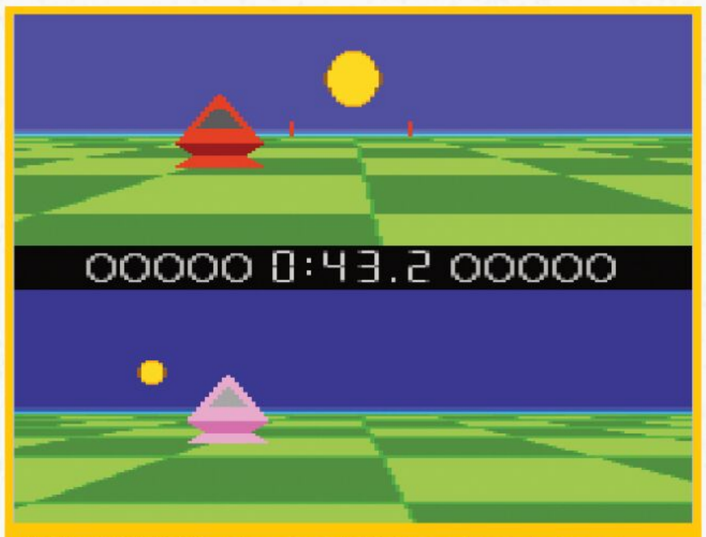
No, because we needed it to be compatible with the old VCS so we had to keep the 6502 [8-bit processor]. In the end we decided, 'Screw it, we won't make it 2600 compatible, we'll make our own board with custom chips and just stick a 2600 board on it as well.' We combined the old hardware with our spiffy new hardware and our custom chip, Maria, was going to have much better graphics and sound.

**Didn't you have to compromise on the sound in the end?**

Yeah, we realised we didn't have enough physical area on the chip… and our budget did



» [Arcade] These chefs in *Food Fight* make Gordon Ramsey seem utterly at peace with the world.




» [Atari 7800] *Ballblazer* is an absolute blast played against a frenemy and *Rocket League* owes it a nod.

» [Atari 7800] *Desert Falcon* was one of the original console games developed by GCC and we love its feathery grace.

not run to having a larger chip size. Plus, we didn't have the people to design the sound [capabilities] and we were all busy with the graphics. This was early 1983 and we thought we'd have it all done in a few months! We did plan to have a sound synthesis chip in every cartridge because we had worked out we could do it so cheaply, it would only add a dollar, so the second generation of cartridge games would come with their own sound hardware. We had it all planned out, which is why on the edge connector for the 7800, we put an audio signal so sound could come from the cartridge and be mixed in with what the machine [was generating].

**If the 7800 had launched on time, the story of Atari and the whole American console business might have been very different.**

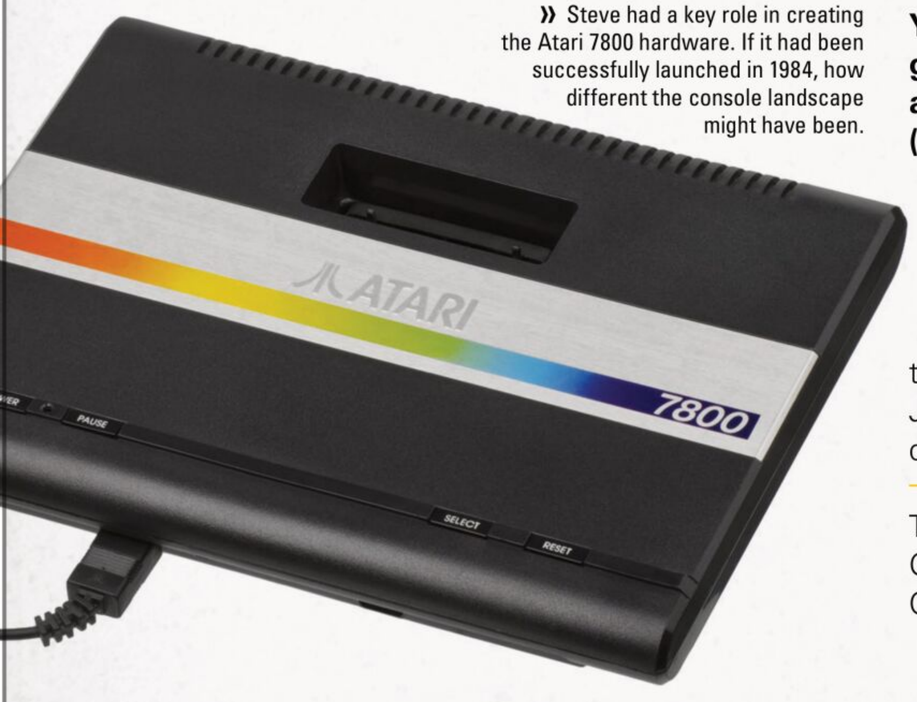
They'd already made 100,000 consoles in 1984 and announced all the cool stuff we had in the pipeline, like the high score cartridge, the computer keyboard, the ability to add Atari peripherals, like a disk drive… this was all supposed to be out for Christmas 1984. Just imagine what kind of world we'd be in if that had happened? This was before Nintendo had brought out the NES in America.

**Atari was bought out by the Tramiels and the 7800 was put 'on hold', though did have something of a relaunch in 1986. Was it a case of too little too late?**

The sales that year weren't bad at all. The graphics quality held up pretty well compared with the NES but yes, it was two years late and it wasn't marketed well… that Tramiel approach of doing everything on a shoestring, not the classic Atari way of having amazing marketing. And all the neat hardware we were planning and all the cool new games… it didn't happen.

**You left GCC in 1984. Why?**

Oh, lots of us were laid off and GCC was completely done with games by then. I actually went back to MIT in 1985 and finished my degree. Kevin once told me he was jealous because he never did! I started my own company, Trilobyte Systems, the same year and for the last 35 years I've been doing chip design as a consultant and a contractor. I've done work for Hewlett Packard, Intel, lots of companies… but nothing in the games business.




» Steve had a key role in creating the Atari 7800 hardware. If it had been successfully launched in 1984, how different the console landscape might have been.

**You have remained very involved in the retro games' scene, though, speaking at conventions and at the American Classic Arcade Museum (ACAM) in New Hampshire.**

ACAM would bring in university students studying game design so they could play vintage games and I'd give lectures to them while they were there about what it was like making games back in the Eighties. That was a lot of fun, seeing all these kids excited about getting into the industry. Just the idea you can now get a degree in games design blows my mind! ✱

Thanks to Steve Szymanski, Paul Moody and Steve Golson for use of their original images and Martyn Carroll for additional help.

## YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

**Readers can get involved at www.retrogamer.net/forum**

**Merman: What was the worst bug you had to deal with on *Ms Pac-Man*?**

[Laughs] We had a couple of bugs which showed up really late and one was to do with the cocktail table version, where you sit across from each other. The screen has to flip when it's the other players turn and we found that everything flipped… except the Ms Pac-Man character! Then Mike Horowitz found that there was somewhere Ms Pac-Man could hide on the first screen and the ghosts would never get her. He changed the monster algorithm so after a certain amount of time, the red monster would just go directly to get her… a hiding place would've been useful on later screens to let you go to the bathroom but we stopped that.

**Northway: Why did the 7800 use a line buffer?**

Because that's how arcade games worked and that's what we were familiar with. When you have moving characters, you can have a bit-mapped screen, a place in memory to store every pixel on-screen, but that takes a lot of memory, which was expensive in the early Eighties. Instead, you can just use enough memory to store one line [of what will be displayed on-screen] and you paint the screen, one line at a time. It uses a minimal amount of memory to display lots of moving things. It was so small, I could put the entire line buffer on my custom chip and do magic things, like the ability to clear the buffer instantly. We added a second buffer – double buffering – so now you could be filling one while the other is displaying, giving you more time… we dreamed up some wonderful architectures.

**Cafeman: What drives your enthusiasm to keep speaking about your time making games?**

If anyone is prepared to buy me a plane ticket and fly me to a show, then I'll go! It was fun back then and if I can share a little bit of that with people… and these games are still fun. I tell you, *Ballblazer* on the 7800 is still a wonderful game. It's partly that but also the fans are so interested in these stories – and I haven't told them all yet!

# LocoRoco

## GOTTA CATCH 'EM ALL

» PSP » 2006 » JAPAN STUDIO

**One of the things I've always said about any console is that it's only as good as the games that are available for it.** Fortunately, Sony's very first handheld had some absolute belters and some of its best were those that tried to do something a little different from the norm.

I completed *LocoRoco* earlier this year again after digging out my PSP and going through my collection of 40-odd games. (And no, I didn't complete all of them.) The brainchild of Tsutomu Kouno, *LocoRoco* is a delightful little platformer that requires you to roll a gelatinous blob around an eye-searingly colourful landscape to joyously boppy music.

Movement is handled via the L and R buttons and it's also possible to jump by pressing both buttons together. Handily, you can split your amorphous blob into smaller forms, which allows you to reach otherwise inaccessible areas (don't worry, you can reform to your bigger form whenever you need to). You'll need to use all these abilities at your disposal in order to reach the many cute MuiMui that are tucked away in each stage, whilst avoiding the enemies which can damage you and cause your gelatinous mass to shrink, meaning less points at the end of a stage.

Other things to look out for as you roll across the colourful landscapes include Pickories which are used to score points and collect minigames and berries which will cause your smiling blob to grow as each one is consumed. Grabbing berries is important as many MuiMui are blocked off by some of LocoRoco's bigger, sleepier inhabitants and you'll often need to reach a certain mass in order to wake them. Reach the required target and your blob will split into its smaller forms and start singing to awaken them – it's a delightful touch and typical of the creativity that has been injected into Japan Studio's game.

*LocoRoco* won't take you very long to complete, but longevity is assured if you do decide to doggedly seek out the many Pickories, berries and MuiMui hidden away on each stage. Hell, I've been returning on and off to it for the last 15 years and I still haven't managed to find them all yet. ✱

# RETRORATED

>> This month we complete the long-awaited sequel to Metroid Fusion, build Lego's latest Mario creation, discover how Konami's new Castlevania collection fares and read about some fellow called Pac-Man

»[Switch] Some of the bosses can be exceptionally tough to defeat, but they're so well designed you'll keep at it.

# Metroid Dread

## IS SAMUS' NEW ADVENTURE DREADFUL OR AN EMMI WINNER?

**INFORMATION**

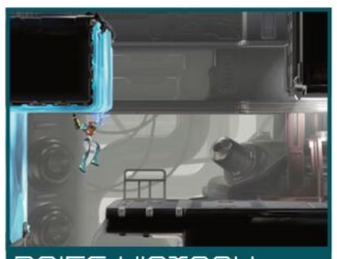
- **FORMAT REVIEWED** SWITCH
- **ALSO ON:** NA
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £49.99
- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** MERCURYSTEAM/ NINTENDO EPD
- **PLAYERS:** 1

**MercurySteam has something of a patchy record when it comes to resurrecting classic game franchises.**

While both *Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow* and *Metroid: Samus Returns* were highly entertaining additions to each series, *Lords Of Shadow*'s sequel was a bit of a chaotic mess. There's quite a lot resting on *Metroid Dread*, as it's not only the first new *Metroid* game since the 2010 release *Metroid: Other M*, it's also a direct sequel to the rather excellent *Metroid Fusion*. Can MercurySteam retain the same magic it harnessed for its *Metroid II* remake *Samus Returns* or will you be transforming into a Morph Ball and unleashing a Power Bomb to destroy everything in protest?

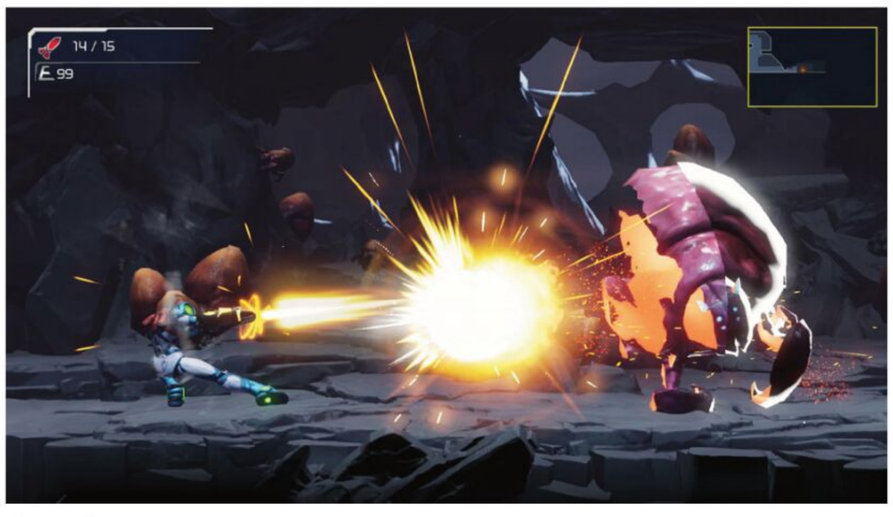
There's no need to go nuclear because, aside from a few little niggles, this is another entertaining adventure that is going to delight more fans than it upsets. Once again working alongside Nintendo EPD, MercurySteam has crafted a solid fast-paced adventure that not only manages to build on the work the two teams started with *Samus Returns*, but also concludes the main Metroid arc that examines Samus' relationship with the Metroids in a rather satisfying way.

While we won't be spoiling too much of *Dread*'s story here we will say that it follows on directly from *Metroid Fusion*, so if you haven't recently played that excellent slice of GBA brilliance you may want to revisit it before jumping into this. Newcomers certainly won't feel lost, but having completed *Fusion* on the very day *Dread* was first announced we can reveal that playing it certainly added to our overall enjoyment of



**BRIEF HISTORY**

» The original *Metroid* appeared on the Famicom Disk System in 1986 (it would appear on the NES the following year). It introduced gamers to Samus Aran and proved to be popular enough to secure a Game Boy sequel in 1991, which was remade in 2017 by MercurySteam and Nintendo EPD. The 1994 release *Super Metroid* is considered by many to be the best game in the series, while *Metroid Prime* proved the franchise could work equally well in 3D. *Metroid Dread* is the sequel to the GBA release *Metroid Fusion*, which debuted in 2002.




»[Switch] Performance in *Metroid Dread* is generally excellent and it rarely dips below 60 fps.

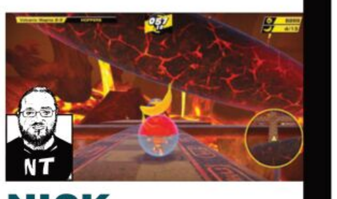
»[Switch] Whether you sneak or flee, encounters with the EMMI are always tense affairs.

## ✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH

**DARRAN**

**Diablo II: Resurrected**

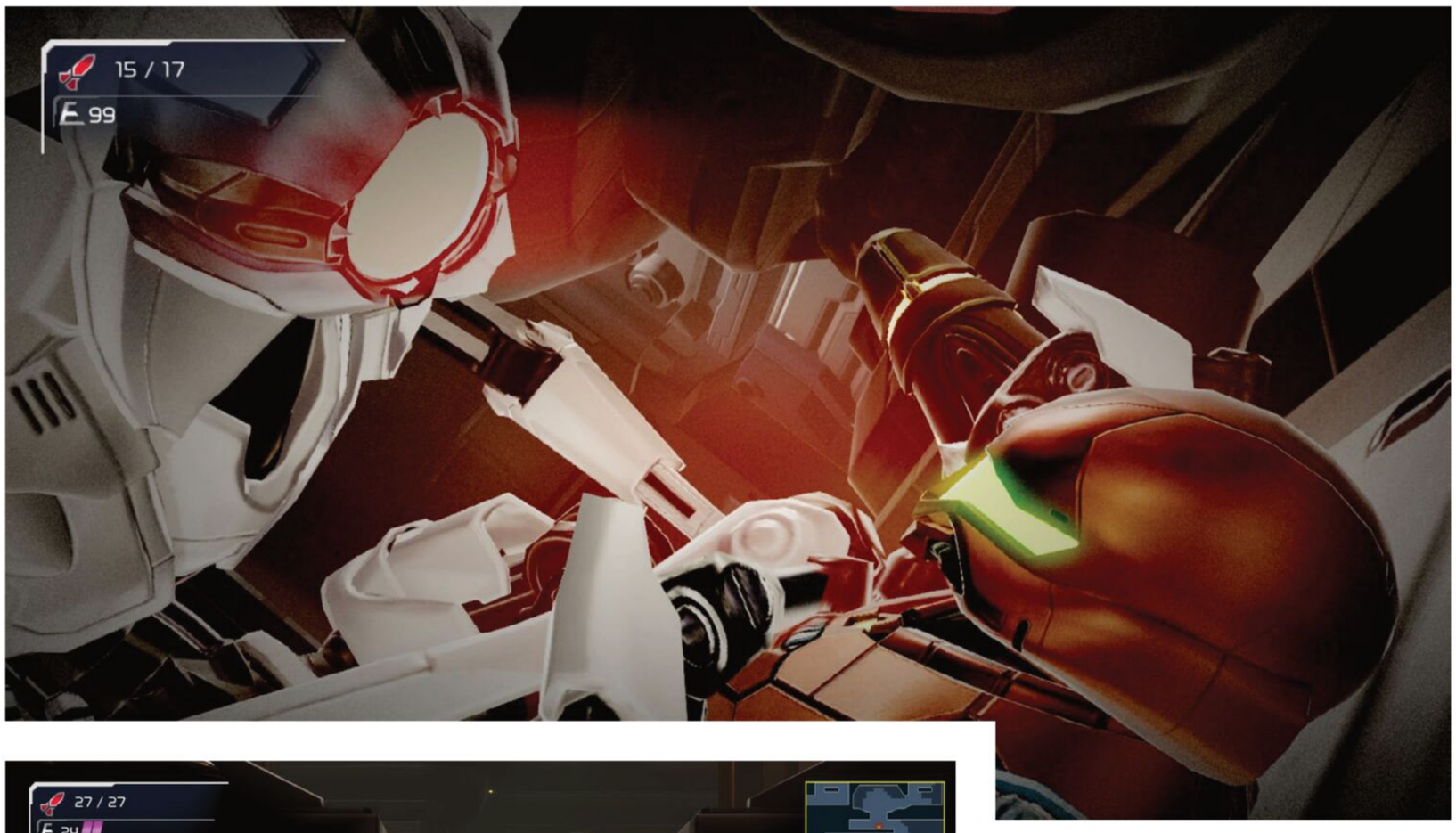
It's definitely showing its age next to *Diablo III*, but I've still had a lot of fun hacking away at the game's numerous monstrosities.




**NICK**

**Super Monkey Ball Banana Mania**

I haven't had people round for a Monkey Target party yet, but the fiendish regular stages are keeping me perfectly busy.



» [Switch] The melee attacks from *Samus Returns* have been carried over, further strengthening Samus' abilities.

Samus' new adventure. One of the big plot points of *Dread* also revolves around one of its big new gameplay mechanics – the introduction of EMMIs and stealth sections. As Samus investigates the planet ZDR she comes into contact with a number of EMMI (Extraplanetary Multiform Mobile Identifier) robots. These dangerous constructs will kill Samus immediately if they catch her in the areas they patrol so she must use her abilities (which in true *Metroid* form, slowly unlock over time) to evade them. If she is caught, she's doomed, unless she can briefly stun them with an incredibly hard to achieve parry.

That's right, one of *Samus Returns*' most divisive mechanics is back and it's back in a big way. If you didn't enjoy its introduction in *Samus Returns*, it's unlikely that its inclusion here will change your mind. While it does routinely crop up in numerous boss encounters, which is either heresy or a welcoming challenge depending on your viewpoint, the window to parry attacks seems better here, meaning it can be a devastatingly quick way to finish off certain enemies. Granted it's far less effective against the marauding EMMIs that you encounter, but that's to be expected as there would be no point hiding from them if you could easily counter them each time you were caught.

While the stealth sections do crop up with some regularity, they don't overpower the core structure of *Dread*'s gameplay, or the new additions like Samus' Stealth Cloak, which allow her invisibility at the cost of slower movement. As a result, each encounter with the dangerous machines will fill you with dread.

Aside from these new stealth sections and continuing the melee-based and Free Aim mechanics that were introduced in *Samus Returns*, *Metroid Dread* is very much business as usual and that means you've got a huge world to explore which slowly and cleverly expands as you reawaken more of Samus' latent powers – either by defeating EMMIs or by discovering hidden Chozo statues. Those that enjoyed Samus' new Aeion abilities from *Samus Returns* will be delighted to hear that they are expanded upon here, while you'll also discover new skills to go alongside fan-favourites.

Boss encounters are another high point, as some of the later battles are quite excellent, requiring you to master numerous patterns and make the fullest of Samus' skills. Yes, some will bemoan the inclusion of the parry requirements that appear in certain fights, but we found they enhanced the action, leading to great little interactive cutscenes that let Samus show off her prowess. The difficulty here is high though, so be prepared for a lot of punishment before you reach *Dread*'s conclusion.

ZDR like many previous *Metroid* games is structured into distinct areas which effectively act as levels and they're all cleverly highlighted through environmental design so that it's easy to work out where you are. There's also numerous ways to transport to each area thanks to teleporters, shuttles and elevators. One frustration we did have was that signposting initially felt weak and there were quite a few times early on in the game when it simply wasn't clear where you should be heading. The map often feels cluttered too, which further hampers navigation. Everything opens up beautifully though once you gain access to the Morph Ball and it simply gets better the more equipped Samus gets, as the map is filled with all sorts of neat little secrets to discover.

While the aforementioned EMMI encounters are solid, we'd have liked more variety in how you actually defeat them, as they start to feel a little samey towards the game's end. We'd have also preferred a slightly stronger soundtrack, but what's here is solid and instantly recognisable to long-time fans.

*Metroid Dread* does feel like it has taken an age to arrive – a version was first attempted in 2005 – but the long wait has still been worth it. ✱

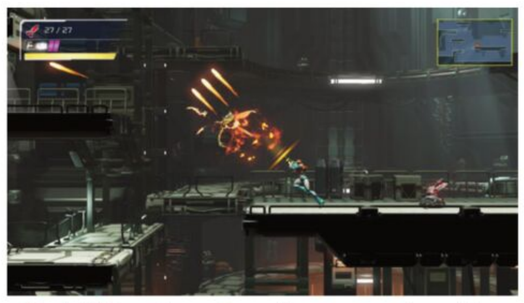
» [Switch] We played *Metroid Dread* on the new Switch OLED and the game looks superb thanks to clever colour choices and the inky blackness of the screen.

## ✱ WHY NOT TRY

### ▼ SOMETHING OLD
**METROID FUSION, GBA**

### ▼ SOMETHING NEW
**HOLLOW KNIGHT, SWITCH**

» [Switch] Samus' Stealth Cloak can shield her EMMIs but its use is limited and can even consume her energy.




» [Switch] Powering up Samus' arm cannon doesn't just kill enemies quicker, but also opens up new paths.

## In a nutshell

**It doesn't quite hit the heights of *Super Metroid* and *Metroid Fusion*, but *Metroid Dread* remains another great addition to one of Nintendo's most consistent franchises. Don't miss it.**

>> Score **85%**

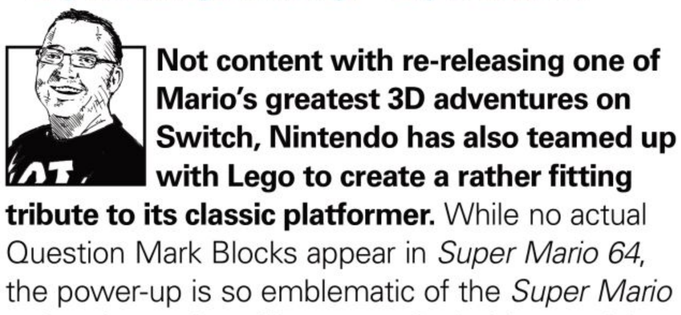
## PICK OF THE MONTH

# Lego Super Mario 64 Question Mark Block

» **Buy it from:** lego.com/en-gb » **Buy it for:** £159.99

»Here's the block in all its glory. Some additional surprises are hidden in the block's front. Can you find them?

»The detail throughout is excellent and you'll notice all sorts of references to Nintendo's hit game.



**Not content with re-releasing one of Mario's greatest 3D adventures on Switch, Nintendo has also teamed up with Lego to create a rather fitting tribute to its classic platformer.** While no actual Question Mark Blocks appear in *Super Mario 64*, the power-up is so emblematic of the *Super Mario* series that we're willing to overlook this oversight (Lego does address this in the 276-page manual).

Lego's latest project features 2,064 pieces spread across 13 packets of Lego and 392 steps, making it a build that's surprisingly complicated at times. The early stages of the build focus on the core components of the block and house some cool Lego Technic-style flourishes that enable you to easily flip the block's top, which hides its cool secrets. There's quite a few moving parts here and it's a little tricky in places so younger Lego fans will definitely need some help.

The rest of the build focuses on creating the block's distinctive faces (which, one face aside, become rather dull to build as they're obviously all the same) as well as Princess Peach's Castle and three worlds from the game: Lethal Lava Land, Cool, Cool Mountain and Bob-omb Battlefield. All four of these micro builds are great fun to put together and are packed with references to *Super Mario 64* (you'll discover even more if you own the chunky Mario that comes with Lego's core Adventures With Mario Starter Course).

Be warned though, they use lots of tiny pieces, so can be a little fiddly to put together. Of course, the focus on these smaller pieces means you can cram in lots of clever little touches (you can pull aside part of Peach's home to see the three portal paintings inside for example) and there are numerous hazards and enemies from the series, including cannons and King Bob-omb. The build itself only takes just under six hours to complete, which may seem too short for the relatively high asking price, but it's hard not to be impressed with the many clever touches and hidden surprises that are tucked away inside.

## Super Monkey Ball Banana Mania

» **System:** Switch (tested), PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, PC
» **Buy it from:** Online, retail » **Buy it for:** £34.99+

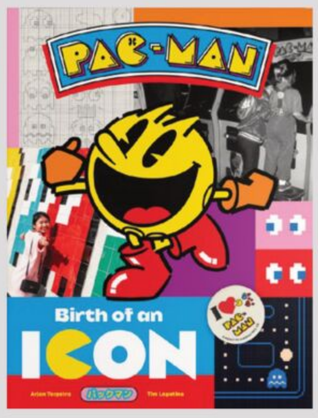
**With over 300 stages and 12 minigames from *Super Monkey Ball 1, 2* and *Deluxe, Banana Mania* is packed with content and mostly, it's as you remember.** The main game's obstacle courses are still challenging, occasionally infuriating and always satisfying to conquer, but infinite lives, assist features and level skips now ease the pain. However, the physics are subtly different and it now feels as though the ball is lighter, making control more twitchy. The result is a good game that isn't the best remake. New players will likely love it, but series veterans may find that the new physics diminish its authenticity and ultimately, the fun.

**NICK THORPE**

» Score **77%**

## Pac-Man: Birth Of An Icon

» **Buy it from:** amazon.co.uk
» **Buy it for:** £50




**The first book dedicated to Pac-Man's creation and cultural impact is every bit as good as you'd hope for such an iconic gaming character.** Arjan Terpstra and Tim Lapetino have done sterling work here, covering every possible aspect of Namco's famous character, from the creation of his debut game to the masses of merchandise that followed. There are interesting interviews, all manner of excellent photography and a huge section covering the many other games that Pac-Man has appeared in. While *Birth Of An Icon* is pricey at £50, there's a huge amount of brilliant information which easily justifies its asking price. Alternatively, a limited edition version is available directly from cookandbecker.com and includes a reissue of *Pac-Man Fever* on vinyl, a commemorative coin and a gorgeous slipcase for $99.95, or you can get a signed edition by Toru Iwatani for $399.

**DARRAN JONES**

## Castlevania Advance Collection

» **System:** PS4 (tested), PS5, Switch, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, PC » **Buy it from:** Online » **Buy it for:** £15.99

**After years of haunting handhelds, the Game Boy Advance *Castlevania* trilogy is back** – this collection comprises *Circle Of The Moon*, *Harmony Of Dissonance*, *Aria Of Sorrow* and the weak SNES port *Vampire's Kiss*. M2 has done the emulation work here and it's very good – on top of the authentic play experience and the usual save states and visual options, you get a choice of regional versions, the ability to rewind gameplay and helpful encyclopaedia options. While the asking price seems a little steep for four games, the GBA games are all very good examples of the post-*Symphony Of The Night* style of *Castlevania*, with *Aria Of Sorrow* standing out as a particular highlight.

**NICK THORPE**

» Score **84%**

# A WORLD OF DREAMS AND ADVENTURES WITH POKÉMON AWAITS. LET'S GO!

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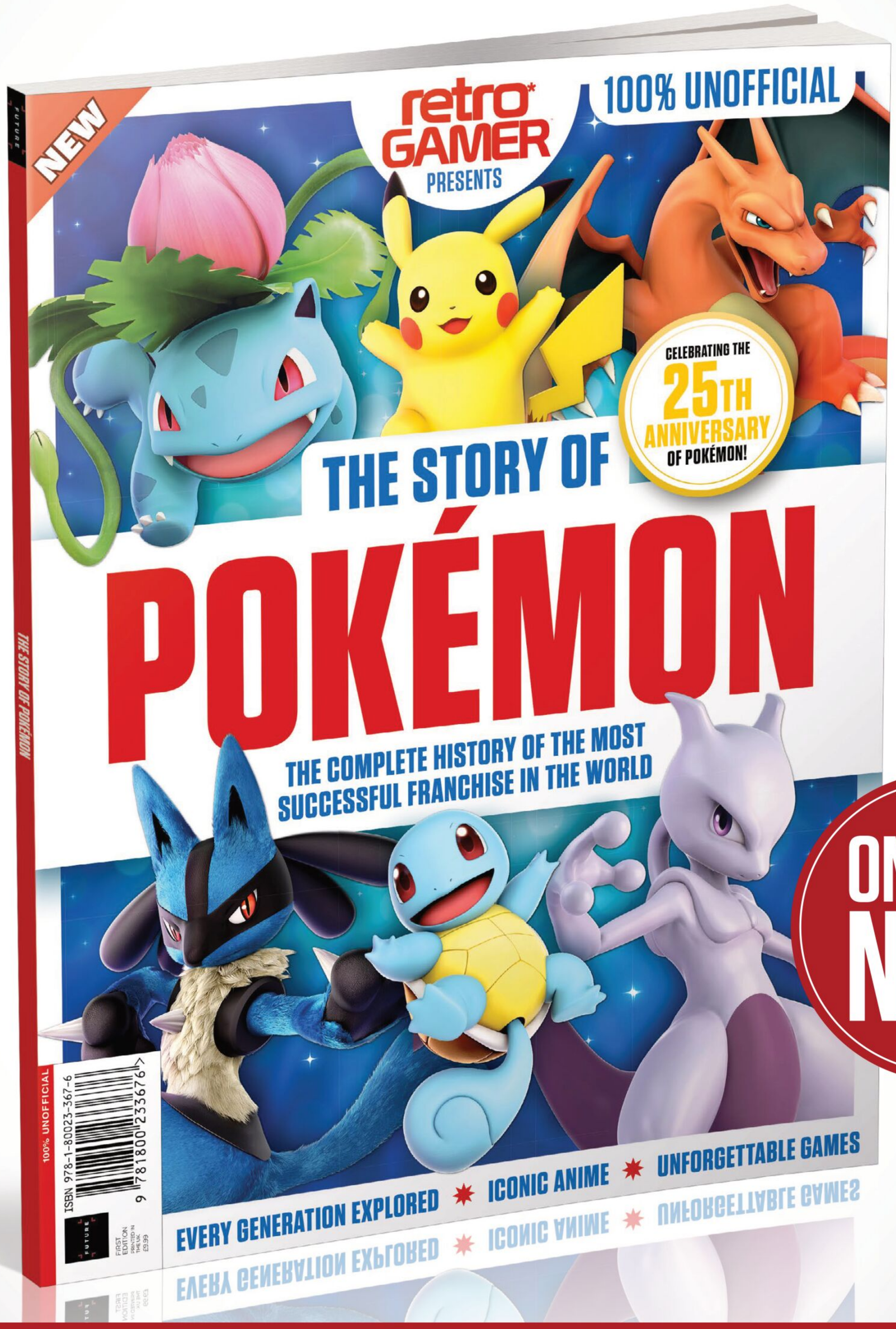


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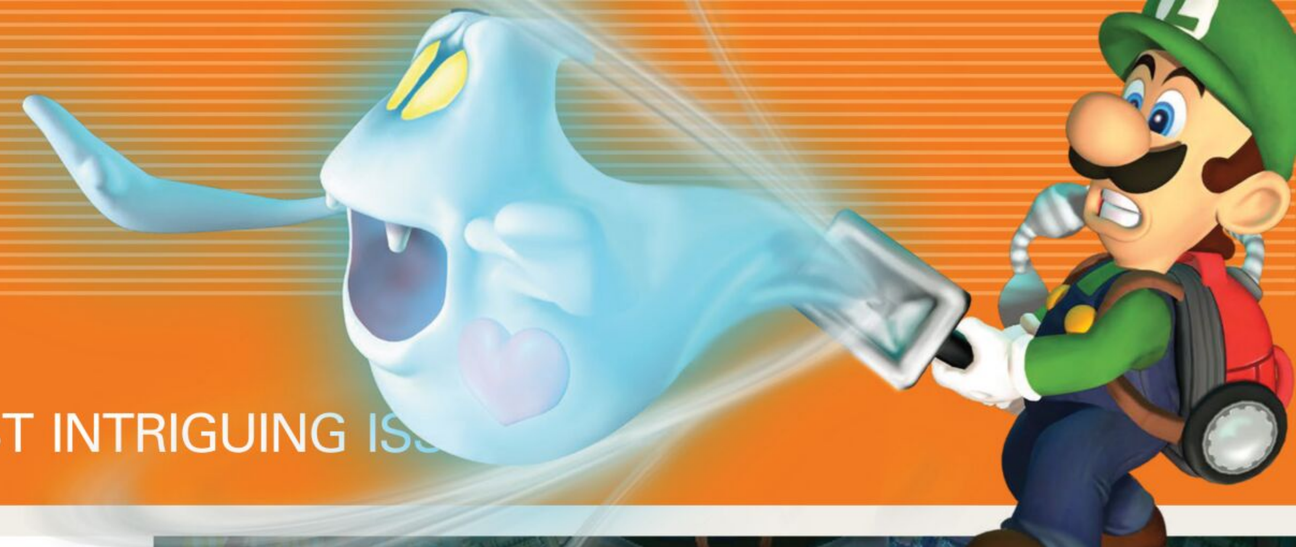


# REVISITING THE GAMECUBE

## The team recall their early memories with Nintendo's console



DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

**Nintendo's GameCube looked deceptively cute, but it proved to be a more than capable system with some incredible exclusives.** Nick, Darran and Tim remember their first experiences with the follow-up to the N64.

### DARRAN

What was everyone's opinion of the GameCube when they first saw it?

### TIM

That's a purple blocky handbag! But that actually worked out well when having to carry them about at work.

### NICK

The console itself looked a bit odd, but as soon as I first saw *Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader* I was blown away. It looked so good, I knew it'd be my next console.

### DARRAN

I wasn't impressed at first, but my hype rose once I started seeing people play early import games at *games™* and *Cube*.

### NICK

Speaking of launch games, what was everyone's favourite?

### DARRAN

From a UK launch perspective it's *Super Monkey Ball*, *Wave Race: Blue Storm*, *Luigi's Mansion* and *Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader*. They cost a packet!

### TIM

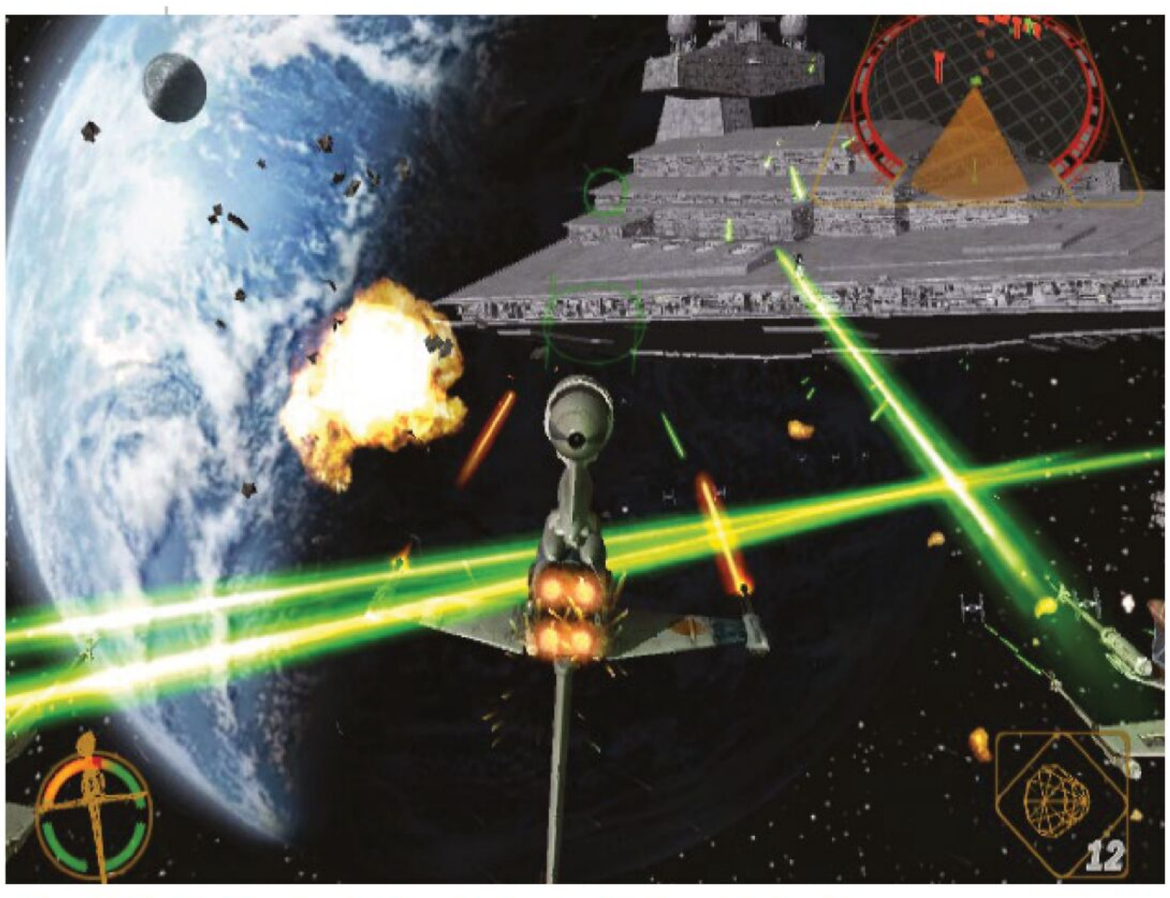
I didn't get a GameCube at launch, but I did like playing *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3*.

### NICK

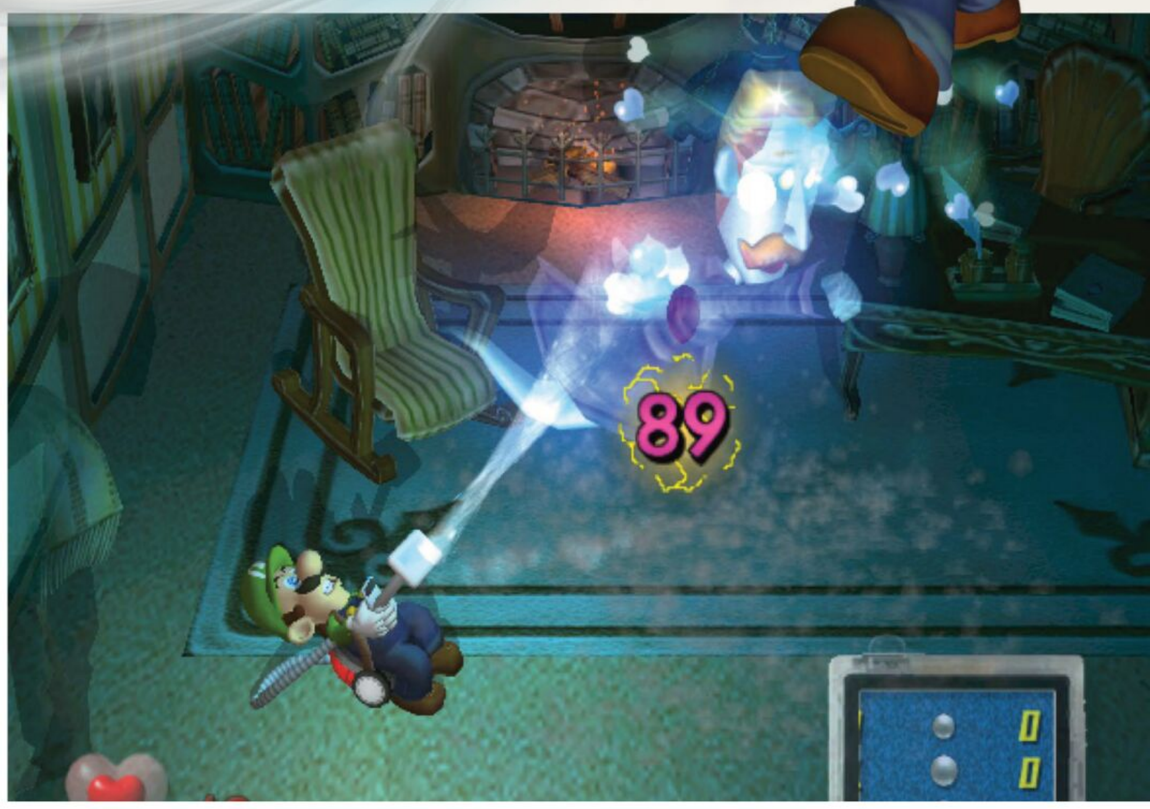
My friend James got it at the UK launch, but he only had *Sonic Adventure 2: Battle* so I didn't have loads of choice.

### DARRAN

I saw a lovely story about your GameCube on Twitter, Nick. Could you perhaps briefly summarise it for us here?



» [GameCube] *Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader* convinced Nick he needed a GameCube.



» [GameCube] *Luigi's Mansion* is an early GameCube release that went on to receive a couple of sequels.

> "I really came to rely on Cube and NGC because the GameCube started to get squeezed out of the multiformat mags"
>
> **NICK THORPE**

### NICK

I got my GameCube on Christmas Day in 2002. It was a day of mixed emotions – we went to see my grandad, who really enjoyed Christmas, but we all had an unspoken understanding that this would be his last. My mum, knowing that my sister and I would need our moods lifted after that visit, had kept one present back for each of us. She dropped big hints that it was alcohol, but it was in fact the GameCube I'd been hoping for.

### DARRAN

I loved reading that. I just decided to preorder one the day before launch. Everyone on the mag was convinced they were all sold out, but not only did I order it, I was second in the queue that evening, so I got mine ahead of people who had waited months. Lol.

### TIM

I got a free GameCube when I started on *Cube*, which was bloody nice. First review: *Freedom Fighters*, that was alright. And then I ransacked the games cupboard so I eventually played everything.

### DARRAN

I used to love going through *games™*'s cupboard. *Lost Kingdoms* was my first *games™* review, so I have a soft spot for it. Do you remember much rivalry with the other mags Tim? I can't remember any. But then, I was on the fucking cool mag!

### TIM

You were on the snobby, head-up-your-arse mag. *Play* and *XBM* (or *XBUM* as the *Cube* team hilariously called it) used to rip the shit out of us. And then the Wii came along. I'm kind of glad *Cube* got shut down before it came out. What did you think of it Nick? Being a pleb at the time and all and not like us industry veterans.

### NICK

I didn't play favourites – over time I really came to rely on *Cube* and *NGC* because the GameCube started to get squeezed out of the multiformat mags, kind of in the same way it got squeezed off shop shelves. When Argos and the PC World group dropped it, I was really worried I'd made the wrong choice.

## Follow us online so that you can join in the discussions

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» Not many games used these bongos, but the ones that did were great fun.

**DARRAN**
There did seem to be a little snobbery towards the GameCube, which I never really understood because it's actually quite a powerful piece of kit. I still remember seeing *Resident Evil 4* being demoed for the first time and I literally picked up the GameCube while it was running because I couldn't believe it was capable of running it. What games highlighted the power of the console to you?

**TIM**
*Pikmin*! Looked gorgeous and you had loads of tiny critters running about. Also the graphics on *WWE Day Of Reckoning* were pretty impressive at the time.

**NICK**
For me it was *F-Zero GX*. I couldn't believe that something that looked so good could move so fast, and with that many different racers on the screen.

**DARRAN**
Oh my, that's a good shout, Nick. I don't think it played as well as *F-Zero X*, but it looked incredible. Wasn't that the holy trinity of Sega, Nintendo and Namco?

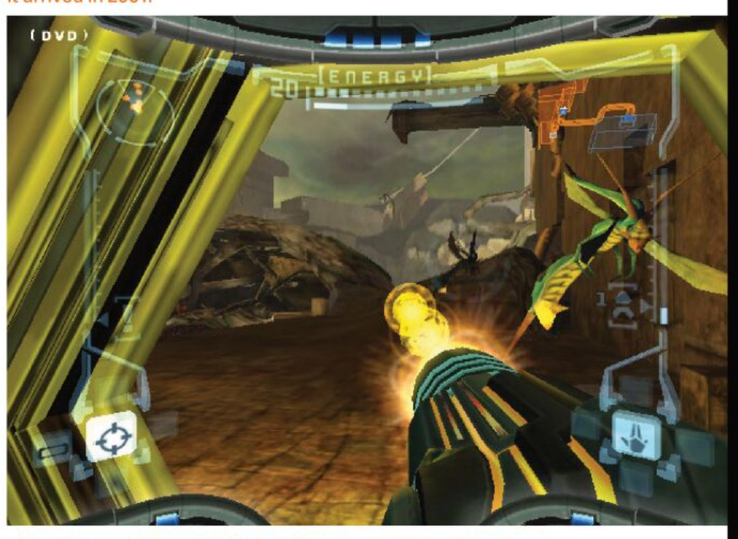
**NICK**
The arcade version was, yeah – the Triforce board! *F-Zero AX* actually turned out to be hidden on the *GX* disc, but it didn't get discovered until recently.

**DARRAN**
And that's why they call you Nickipedia! So Tim, can you really believe the Gamecube came out 20 years ago? Do you feel old?

**TIM**
Yes I can, and yes I do. Stupid ageing. But still, some great memories – even the time we pretended to play *Donkey Konga* in the park for a video for one of the cover discs.

**DARRAN**
I don't remember that, but I do remember everyone buying them from Japan. There were bloody bongos everywhere! ✱

» [GameCube] Tim remembers being mightily impressed by *Pikmin* when it arrived in 2001.




» [GameCube] *Metroid Prime* is a fantastic exclusive that nicely highlights the capabilities of Nintendo's console.

» [GameCube] *F-Zero GX* really impressed Nick with its speed and graphics.

# READERS REACT

## You were only too happy to tell us your favourite GameCube games

**Nick Wilson**
*Resident Evil Remake*. It's the best remake of any videogame ever made.

**Killian Bell**
I know this isn't a popular answer, but *Star Fox Adventures*. I loved that game and ended up playing it all the way through four or five times.

**Adam Rowley**
*The Legend Of Zelda: Wind Waker*. As a kid the sense of adventure was amazing, it still is worth the replay as an adult.

**Reimecker**
My favourite game is *Eternal Darkness* because it is unique. I've never played anything again with this feeling.

**Chatsunami**
I definitely have a soft spot for *Pokémon Colosseum*! I remember being so hyped to play it when I first got it.

**Andy Endean**
*Resident Evil 4*. The absolute peak of the series!

**Cameron Phillips**
I'd say *Harvest Moon* because I have happy memories of my wife playing it for ages whilst she was on maternity leave with our son.

**Kara Jane Adams**
*F-Zero GX*, one of the greatest, purest racers. Nothing beats the feeling when you settle into the groove and everything just flows.

**The Cartridge Corner**
*Billy Hatcher And The Giant Egg* is a vastly underrated platformer.

**JpGenerations**
*Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door*. Has a great story, wonderful style, excellent combat system and the best characters and enemies in the *Mario* RPG saga.

**Carl Lavery**
Tough choice but *Luigi's Mansion*. I just love the atmosphere of it and it has good replayability with Mirror Mode and the increased amount of treasure for high scores.

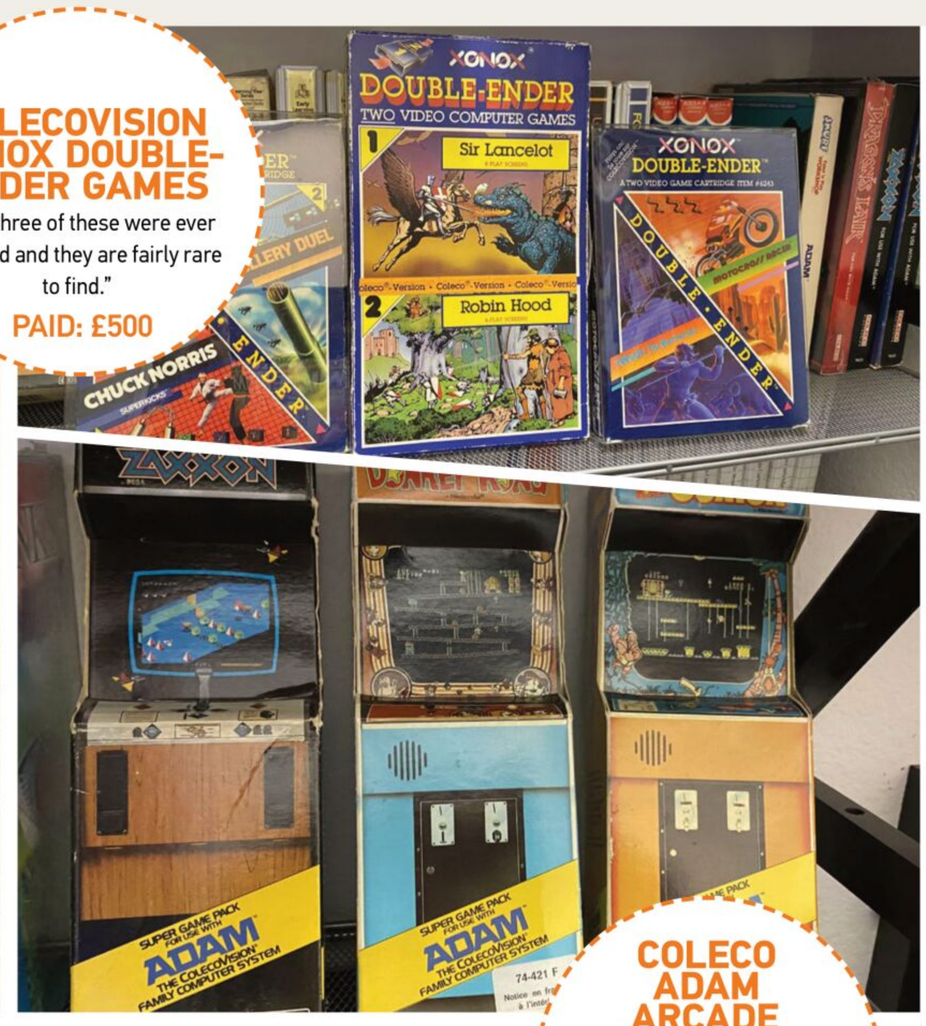
# COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

**SPLICEVISION (BRAZILIAN COLECOVISION CLONE)**

A pretty rare South American clone of a ColecoVision console.

**PAID: $1,000**




**COLECOVISION XONOX DOUBLE-ENDER GAMES**

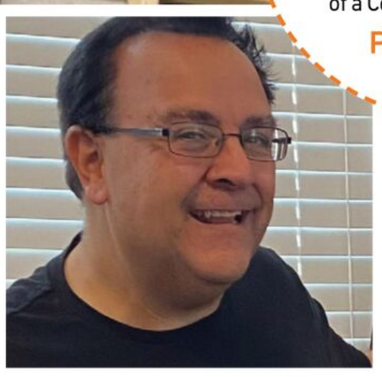
"Only three of these were ever released and they are fairly rare to find."

**PAID: £500**

**COLECO ADAM ARCADE BOXES**

"These are fairly rare and some of the coolest-looking game boxes I've ever seen."

**PAID: $500**



## BIO

**NAME:**
Robb Alvey

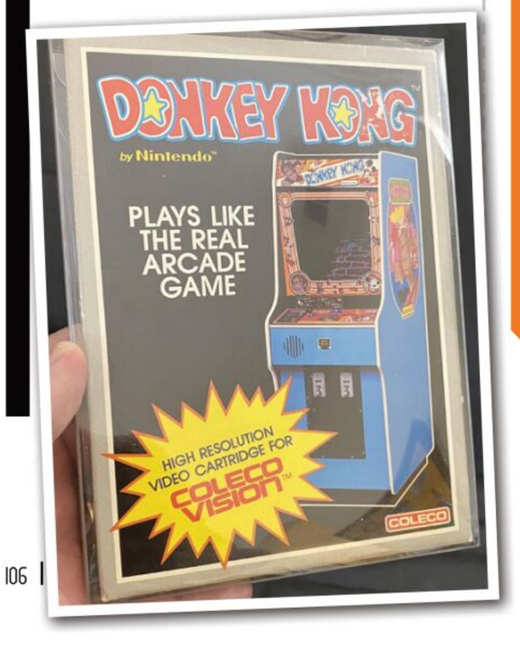
**LOCATION:**
Orlando, Florida

**FAVOURITE GAME:**
Donkey Kong

**FAVOURITE SYSTEM:**
ColecoVision

**COLLECTION WORTH:**
$75,000

**INSTAGRAM:**
@ColecoVisionFan




# TRUE COLECO VISION

## How niche consoles and computers shaped a love for gaming

**This month's collector, Robb Alvey from Orlando, Florida, is unique in two ways: he's our first dedicated ColecoVision collector and is also a videogame industry veteran having overseen the production of dozens of games since 1988**. But first, the collecting. "I mostly just collect games that I like or matches some of my interests," begins Robb. "I'm not really a completest but instead just want games that interest me, that I grew up with or I think have some interesting value such as cool box art, interesting gameplay or historical significance." To this end, Robb specialises in the early era of console gaming with over 1,000 Famicom games and 500 apiece on the Atari 2600 and ColecoVision. "[The ColecoVision] was the console I really grew up with. I was 12 years old when I got it Christmas 1982 and that was also the first time an arcade game at home actually looked and played like the arcade game – after years of Atari 2600 arcade ports, it was quite the milestone."

It sounds it, because while today the ColecoVision remains something of an underdog in retrogaming circles, its influence, certainly in Robb's case, cannot be overstated. "I think in many ways it also inspired consoles like the NES," he notes. "There's always that hypothetical timeline where the crash never happened and who knows where the Coleco would have ended up?" And for Robb himself, it was part of an era that nudged him into the gaming industry. "Between the ColecoVision, C64 and NES, those are the consoles and computers that shaped my love of gaming and pushed me to get into the business." Robb went on to forge a notable career, particularly as a senior producer at Virgin Interactive in the early Nineties. "It was whirlwind crazy, those years! Project after project where everyone was trying to push the envelope, consoles were rapidly changing and there was a lot of pressure to deliver games with features and quality that hadn't been done before. Honestly, it may have been the favourite years of my career."

Along with the three mentioned above, Robb is also an enthusiastic supporter of niche machines such as the Coleco Adam computer ("I've always felt it's a shame it didn't have better success"), and the vibrant homebrew scene. "I think the homebrew scene is extremely important for any console – these are the people keeping a console alive that hasn't seen a retail shelf in decades. Without those people, these consoles would be long forgotten and would not have the thriving communities like they do today."

Along with many classic and homebrew games, Robb's collection also holds a number of custom-made items; but of particular interest is his jewel in the crown, a sealed ColecoVision *Donkey Kong*. Originally packed in with the ColecoVision console, the release of the Adam saw these rare boxed copies surface. As we write, there's one on eBay at a mere $40,000 – maybe one day Kong will give Mario a real run for his money? ✱

**JEWEL IN THE CROWN**

**DONKEY KONG – COLECOVISION**

■ "Original and still sealed game which came packed in with the original ColecoVision.

**PAID: $1,000**

## Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

WIZARD OF ID'S WIZMATH
"This is another very rare ColecoVision game that's now very hard to find complete in box."
PAID: $1,000
CUSTOM MADE COLECO MINI ARCADE GAMES
"While not ColecoVision exactly, these handheld games were another popular item Coleco made and I have a collection of custom built ones that perfectly replicate what the consoles looked like in the Eighties."
PAID: $450

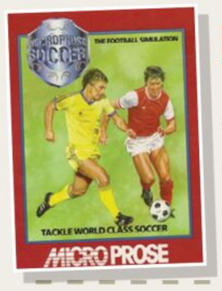
# BARGAIN HUNT

## Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

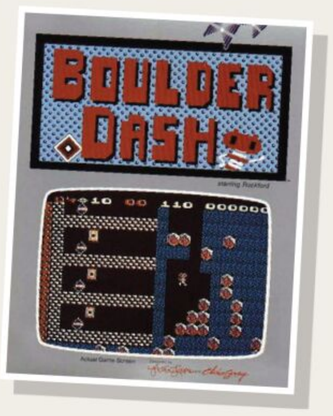
### EVERCADE VS

We are big fans of the Evercade handheld and now it's getting a home console version together with multiplayer support – hence the VS tag, we reckon. As with the Evercade, retailers such as Funstock are bundling up carts with the console and the *Mega Bundle* offers up a massive 108 games spread over ten cartridges for a penny shy of **£230.**



### MICROPROSE SOCCER

If you fancy a boot at this trailblazing footie game from the team that would become famous for *Sensible Soccer*, then prices are unlikely to leave you with less cash than Oldham Athletic. The Spectrum game is cheapest, while some disk versions almost reach a tenner. Crikey, Brian.

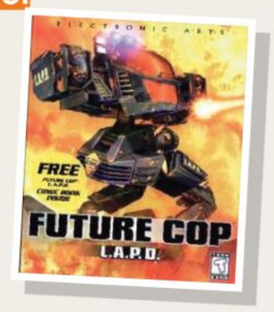


### BOULDER DASH

Strangely, despite its popularity, copies of Databyte's *Boulderdash Construction Kit* still fetch relatively rock-solid prices. Looking for a diamond in the rough? The NES game, even boxed, can often be bagged for under **£15** posted. We dig that! [You're fired – Ed]

### FIRST SAMURAI

The woes of Mirrorsoft at the time of *First Samurai*'s release means that copies are surprisingly rare, at least the Amiga and Atari ST versions. Expect to pay over **£30** for a good condition boxed copy while a cart only SNES version rarely costs more than **£15.**



### FUTURE COP: LAPD

This PlayStation robotic stomp 'n' shooter is a solid seller, seldom going for less than **£40**.

### BODY HARVEST

As one of the more common Nintendo 64 games, prices are relatively low for this sci-fi horror shoot-'em-up with auctions of boxed PAL copies usually ending under **£20.**

### PROJECT ZERO: MAIDEN OF BLACK WATER

This rare Wii U game comes in a fancy limited edition that's gonna set you back a scary **£200** notes minimum. Boo!

HOW MUCH?!

### SUPER MARIO BROS 3

While researching prices for *Super Mario Bros 3*, we stumbled upon a copy that recently sold for a wallet-busting **£600**. Graded as IMP (Improperly Married Parts), it's desirable – apparently – because of the alternate positioning of the word 'Bros' on the cartridge. Um, OK.

Prices correct at time of print

# MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

# WIGGLE IT, JUST A LITTLE BIT

## Why Darran is a big fan of Nintendo's Wii

**One thing I admire about Nintendo is that it's never afraid to try something new.** Sometimes those gambles don't work and you end up with the Virtual Boy and the Wii U, but other times the Kyoto-based giant hits a home run and the Wii is one such example.

I was working on **Retro Gamer** when Nintendo officially announced that its new console would be called the Wii, and I remember the derision the name faced from numerous magazines at the time. Many had already dismissed the motion controls as "pointless" and I'd heard numerous stories about the supposed power of the system with one of my fellow journalists being told by a PR person at an E3 event that it was essentially just "two GameCubes held together by Sellotape".

Nintendo's console was seriously underpowered next to Microsoft's Xbox 360 and Sony's incoming PS3, but it was also seriously underrated – it turns out you don't need cutting-edge graphics in order to impress casual gamers, you just need a good idea and the Wii turned out to be a very good idea indeed.

The Wii's unique controller was a stroke of genius, because absolutely nobody is intimidated by a remote control. Even if you've never played a videogame before or cared about playing them, you couldn't help but be drawn in by that inviting controller. All of a sudden people who I'd never considered to be gamers were inviting me over to their houses to have a *Wii Sports* night (as well as asking me if I could get them free games). Two things really cemented the Wii's ridiculous casual market appeal to me: watching my 83-year-old nan laughing herself silly while playing *WarioWare: Smooth Moves* and learning that my sister and her husband (who never played videogames) had created a *Wii Sports* bowling league and they all wore printed T-Shirts with their names and Mii avatars emblazoned on them.

If the public was embracing the Wii, the same couldn't always be said in our office. While there were certainly champions of the machine on *games™* those on magazines like *X360* and *Play* were often critical of Nintendo's console. Indeed, one of the favourite jokes that you'd hear from somebody while you were reviewing a Wii game was, "Hey, that looks pretty good – for a Wii game." Oh, how they all laughed, while I died a little inside.

**The truth is, I loved Nintendo's new console.** Hell, I still think it's fantastic today. Back then I didn't care that it was embracing standard definition while its peers were chasing HD, I simply enjoyed the new experiences the Wii was able to offer me. I loved the simplicity of the Wii's controller and I loved how bespoke and unique many of its games felt.

Swinging your Wiimote in *Skyward Sword* or using it to steer in *Mario Kart Wii* added a level of immersion and interaction that you didn't get from simply holding a joypad, and as my interest in the console grew, so too did my library of games. A big complaint about Nintendo's Wii is that it has lots of shovelware. While that's true it also has lots of interesting titles that got ignored or remain unique to the system.

Take *Deadly Creatures* for example. It's a bizarre oddity where you swap between playing a scorpion and tarantula while listening to a backstory of two treasure hunters played by Dennis Hopper and Billy Bob Thornton. It ends with a *Shadow Of The Colossus*-style final boss where you climb up the body of one of the hunters. It's odd, but great fun.

Then there's *Kororinpa*, a bizarre twist on the classic marble labyrinth games, or *Trauma Center: Second Opinion*, which follows on from the DS original and has you using the Wiimote to perform surgery on patients. The macabre masterpiece *Silent Hill: Shattered Memories* is great too and much better than its PSP and PS2 counterparts. The Wii was also responsible for a resurgence in lightgun games with titles like The *House Of The Dead 2* & *3 Return*, *Ghost Squad*, *Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles* and the excellent *Dead Space: Extraction*.

Nintendo's Wii support was exceptional as well, due to titles like *Metroid Prime 3*, *Super Mario Galaxy 1* and *2*, *Super Smash Bros Brawl*, *Punch-Out!!* and countless others. There's something for everyone on the Wii and even some of its poorest games could be enhanced by the system. *Calling* for example, was an awful survival horror game but you'd still shit yourself when you started hearing ghostly voices emanating from your Wiimote's speaker.

It's easy to forget that Nintendo's home consoles were on a downhill sales trajectory before the Wii came along (it shifted over 100 million units compared to the GameCube's 21.75 million) and it's also easy to forget that the Wii had plenty of great games that didn't rely on "silly waggle controls". If you're prepared to explore its library, you'll discover all manner of superb games for it. ✱

### ESSENTIAL PURCHASES

START YOUR COLLECTION WITH THESE

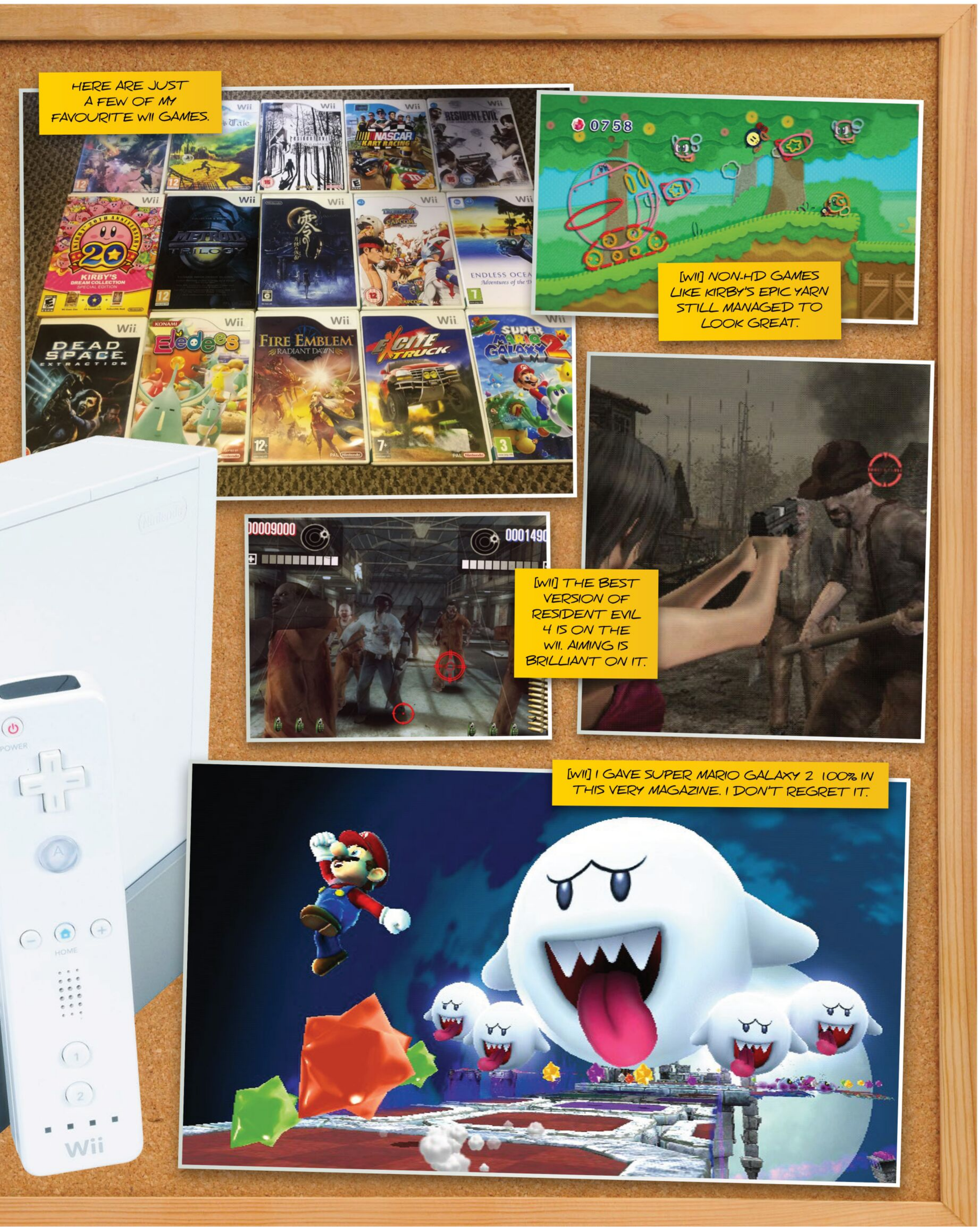
**WARIOWARE: SMOOTH MOVES**
This Wii exclusive has some wondrously silly minigames and has a great multiplayer mode.

**SIN & PUNISHMENT: STAR SUCCESSOR**
I still can't believe Treasure was allowed to make a sequel, but I'm bloody glad it happened.

**KIRBY'S EPIC YARN**
Yes it's extremely easy, but it's a lovely little game with all manner of inventive touches.

**DEAD SPACE: EXTRACTION**
An excellent prequel that matches hectic lightgun blasting to a genuinely excellent story.

**SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2**
A magnificent platformer that highlights why Nintendo remain the king of the genre.


HERE ARE JUST A FEW OF MY FAVOURITE WII GAMES.
[WII] NON-HD GAMES LIKE KIRBY'S EPIC YARN STILL MANAGED TO LOOK GREAT.
[WII] THE BEST VERSION OF RESIDENT EVIL 4 IS ON THE WII. AIMING IS BRILLIANT ON IT.
[WII] I GAVE SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2 100% IN THIS VERY MAGAZINE. I DON'T REGRET IT.

# WHAT WII GAMES ARE IN YOUR LIBRARY?

## Readers reveal their personal favourites

**Burned Retinas**
*The Last Story.* A really good RPG by Hironobu Sakaguchi, it offers an interesting variation of the Active Time Battle system and blends it with real-time action.

**Martin S**
*The House Of The Dead: Overkill.* I was CM for a large number of Wii games during my time at SEGA Europe and that one I had a "real blast" with.

**Steve McCaskill**
*Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games* is one of the best sports party games around. A great cast of characters too.

**David Hodgkins**
*Rhythm Heaven Fever.* The ultimate version of the genre classic. The most pure and outrageously madcap rhythm game that I've ever played.

**Scott**
*Resident Evil 4.* The Wii version in my opinion has the best controls out of all the various ports.

**David Bedwell**
*Wii Sports.* A real fun family experience and definitely one of the best showcases for Wii innovation.

**Fran – Englebert3rd**
Mine has too be *Silent Hill: Shattered Memories.* It tried something different with the franchise, especially with the psychological aspect, and it's closer to a point-and-click adventure.

**Matt McMuscles**
*Sin & Punishment: Star Successor.* An incredibly unlikely sequel to a classic game that barely made its way westward.

**Unclear_User**
Probably *WarioWare: Smooth Moves.* Tremendous fun to play, especially in multiplayer.

**LoopHole**
*Excite Truck* for me. , it utilised the motion steering really well and I loved being able to play my own music in-game.

# MAILBAG

**HAVE YOUR SAY...** SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

## WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of either our NES/Master System or SNES/Mega Drive books

## STAR LETTER

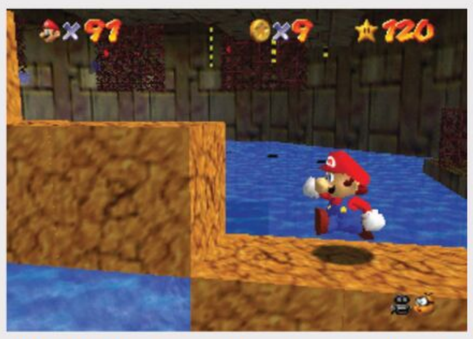
### LAUNCH KINGS

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I have been a subscriber for two or three years now, and will continue to support the great magazine you produce!

I also love collecting, but it is an expensive hobby, so I often have a smaller niche collecting target. My upcoming attempt is to collect launch titles from all the systems I currently own. Have you ever run an article comparing the actual launch line-ups from an era before? It could be an interesting ongoing feature: start with the 8-bit systems, and each month go through the generations and then move to the handhelds.

Which consoles managed to nail it from day one? Who set themselves up to fail before they even started? Did the three SNES PAL launch titles beat the Mega Drive launch games? How could the Jaguar launch with only one title? Who promised but failed to deliver? I feel like there could be lots to talk about during each generation.
Regards,
Simon Walshe

**It's always good to have a collecting goal, Simon and you've come up with a good one. It's a great idea for articles going forward as well, so it's something we'll certainly consider. Have a book for coming up with such a good idea.**



» [N64] We love Simon's idea of revisiting launch games. *Super Mario 64* remains great fun to play.

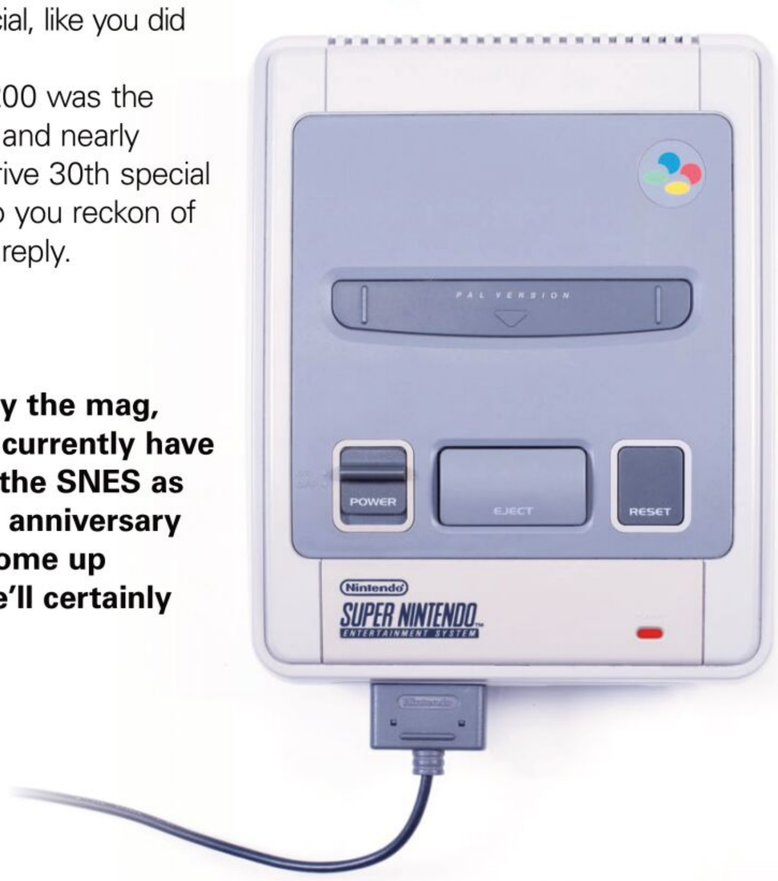
## NO SNES CELEBRATION?

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
Are you going to be celebrating the 30th anniversary of the SNES this year? I know the Japanese model of SNES was released first and then we had the USA launch. The Europe release was this April, so are you planning a 30th anniversary SNES special, like you did for the Mega Drive?

By the way, issue 200 was the most awesome issue and nearly matched the Mega Drive 30th special you did. Also, what do you reckon of the Everdrive? Please reply.
Regards,
Matthew Durlac

**We're glad you enjoy the mag, Matthew. We don't currently have any plans to revisit the SNES as we covered its 30th anniversary in issue 211. If we come up with a new idea, we'll certainly explore it as an option. Everdrives are useful and a handy way of backing up your existing games or accessing new homebrew releases. We quite like them.**

» Matthew is hoping we celebrate the Super Nintendo's PAL birthday. Maybe we'll look at its 30 most defining games in a later issue.




## IS SOMETHING BREWING?

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Will you be bringing back the Homebrew section of the magazine? I know that Jason Kelk passed away from COVID-19 and I think you made the right decision to wait until he was better. Sadly that is no longer possible, so does this mean the section is lost forever? I hope not as it was one of my favourite parts of the magazine and one of the first things I turned to. Jason was clearly passionate about coding on classic systems and his section made me want to try coding for myself. I truly hope that you'll consider bringing it back in some form as I know from reading on forums that many readers miss it.
James Turner

**Thanks for writing in, James. We're glad you enjoyed Homebrew and we're delighted to say that it will be returning by the end of the year. Andrew Fisher will be looking after it and we'll be making a few tweaks to the original format.**

» [Amstrad CPC] The Homebrew section will be returning soon. Here's a classic Amstrad game in the meantime.

## ONE COOL DAD

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
I'm writing to thank you guys for a wonderful magazine that evokes a feeling of nostalgia for my entire household – specifically and especially my dad. It's his 50th birthday, and I'd like to thank him for everything he's done for me and my sister in terms of making us into giant nerds. Our little gaming room is full of what we all grew up with, from the Spectrum to the Saturn, and so much more. This is just a hint of what he's managed to collect! And yes, that's a Japanese Saturn. No, I can't read any of the games we have. Dad, if you're reading this, I love you. I hope you had a great birthday, and that you enjoy the new addition to the collection – the Amiga. Dunno where it's gonna go, but we'll find room.

Thanks, **Retro Gamer**, for your incredible magazine that we bond over each month when the new issue comes out.
Many thanks,
Chelsea Noke

**Thank you for such a lovely letter, Chelsea, your dad has clearly been a big influence on you. We hope you had a fantastic 50th, Chelsea's dad and we hope you enjoy the Amiga. You clearly have great taste in gaming systems.**

» Chelsea's dad has a decent range of computers and consoles that his children have enjoyed playing.

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag Retro Gamer Magazine @RetroGamerMag

# CONTACT US

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**Email:** retrogamer@futurenet.com

» Did you have fond memories of websites like ScrewAttack? Write in and let us know.

## SHAPING AN INDUSTRY

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

Do you guys remember ScrewAttack? That old videogame website that had top tens, clips of the week and more? The original owner, Craig Skistimas, just recently retired from the gaming industry, a few years after the brand died. Have you ever thought of interviewing any of the people from the old website about how they helped shape online gaming culture and content? Or were there any other older websites that you all grew up with that helped shape the industry of online content creation that you fondly remember, or wanted to do any article on?

Thanks,

Benjamin Williams

**Hi Benjamin, we certainly do remember ScrewAttack from back in the day. There's a lot of interesting old websites that helped pave the way for how things are today, so maybe we could create something a little more in-depth. Watch this space as they say.**

## DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

### Magic: The Gathering Arena

**After months and months of constant pestering from Darran, Nick has finally succumbed and gone back to *Arena*. Did Darran simply manage to wear him down, or was he excited to revisit one of his favourite sets, Innistrad. Nick's not saying, but the conversations he now shares with Darran on lunch breaks completely baffle Andy and Tim.**

» [PC] Blue-Eyes White Dragon! I choose you! [Am I doing this right? – Tim]

» [Wii] Readers like Pipes would love an Evercade collection like the Wii's *Metal Slug Anthology*.

» There are already many great games of Evercade, with even more on the way.

## Your say

**Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…**

### What cartridges would you like to see on Evercade?

**Pipes**
I feel a *Metal Slug* collection would be amazing.

**Chris Bellis**
I would love a Capcom collection of some of their better fighters: *Final Fight*, *Saturday Night Slam Masters*, *Captain Commando*, etc.

**Game Continuum**
All of the Disney 8-bit and 16-bit games in one collection.

**Jason**
I know why we can't get any Amiga games, but I would love a Psygnosis, or Team 17 Amiga era collection. So many classics. Just the *Alien Breed* series alone would be worth it.

**TILLY**
I'd like to see a second Atari arcade collection, with more of their popular classics like *Battlezone*, *Tempest*, *Toobin'* but also some lesser-known curated gems, which the Evercade guys are great at digging out!

**DaybreakerRein**
Definitely a Capcom or a Konami collection, hell even ports of the current *Castlevania Collections* would be super awesome, especially since the *Advance Collection* would pair well with the handheld Evercade!

**Chris Jowett**
I'd like to see a 8-bit Hewson collection that includes *Uridium*.

**John M**
I'd love to see some Sega collections on the Evercade. Some System-16 and Master System collections would feel right at home there in my opinion.

**Richard Troupe**
A PC Engine collection would be an absolutely incredible addition to the Evercade library, with titles such as *Gunhed*, *Bonk's Adventure*, *Pac-Land*, *BeBall*, *Bomberman* and *Devil Crash* on a single cartridge.

**Simon Webster**
Nintendo Game Boy, *Super Mario Land*, *Super RC Pro Am*, *Tetris*, *Kirby's Dream Land* and *Link's Awakening* would be awesome.

**Daniel Campbell**
A ColecoVision collection would be cool since we have Atari now and Intellivision is on the way.

**Nick**
Would love a Neo Geo Pocket collection. Always wanted one as a kid and now it's all wildly too expensive to get into!

**Chris Sawyer**
I would love to see a port of the *Repton* games from the old BBC micro. I'd be all over that.


retro GAMER

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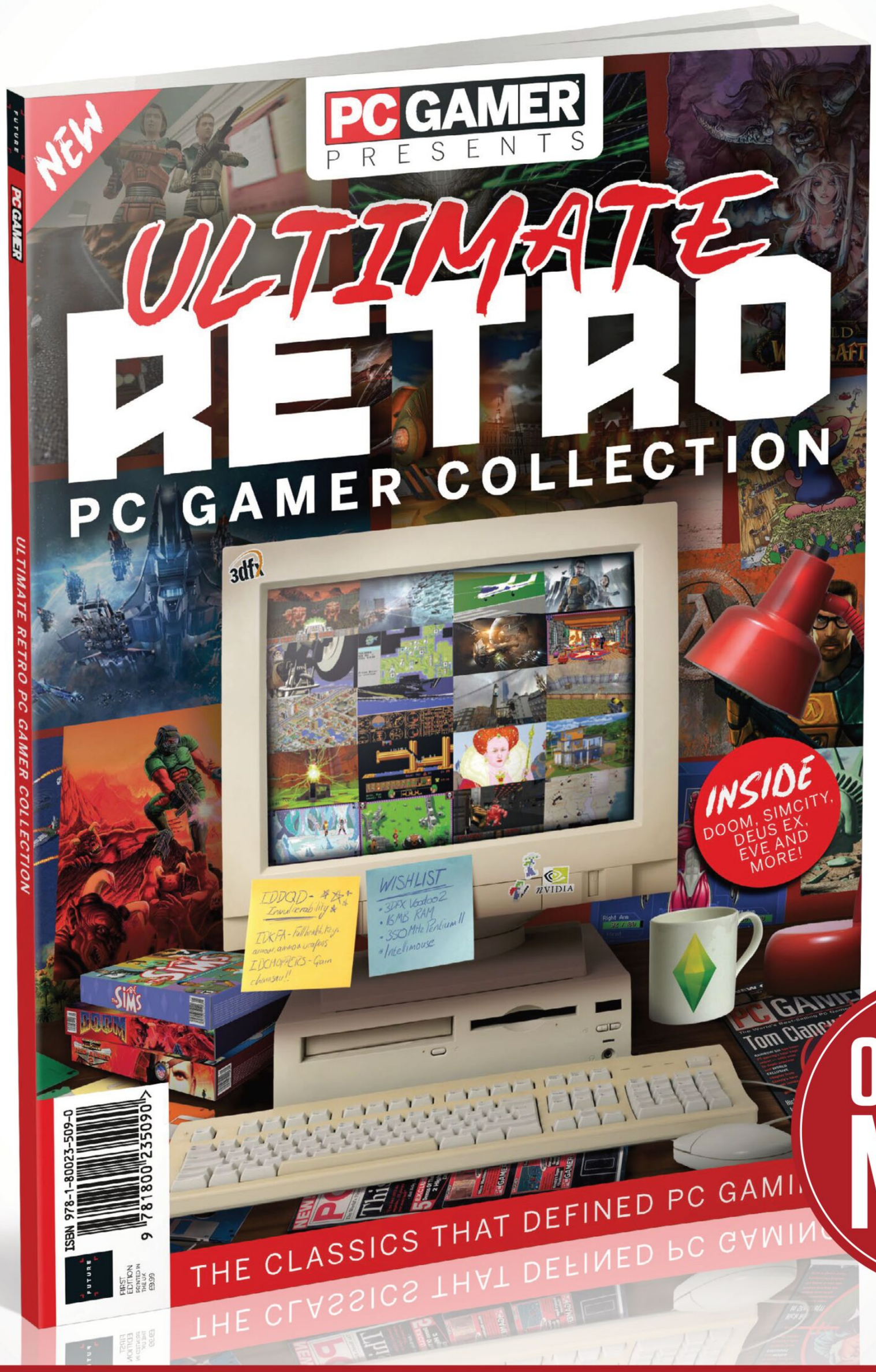


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# ENDGAME

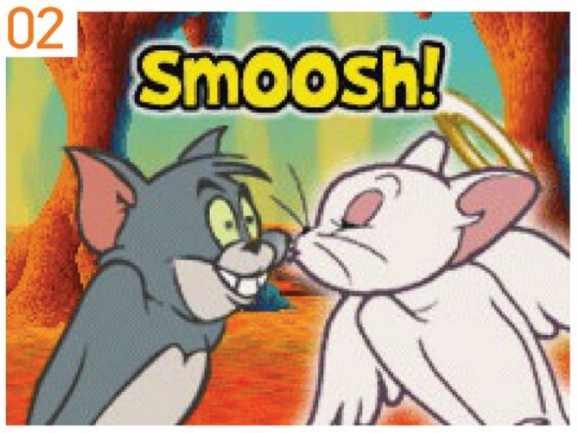
## TOM & JERRY IN INFURNAL ESCAPE

» Those antagonistic animals have been at it again, and feisty feline Tom has ended up flattened by a grand piano. That sent him down to the underworld, which is not where he wanted to be, but by doing the bidding of the angel Toodles he has restored his karma and is ready to rest. Let's see what kind of reward he gets in exchange for all of that good behaviour...

01

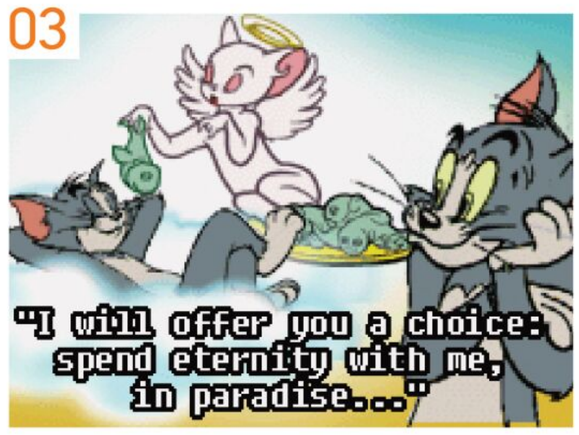
» Of course Tom's final arduous labour would be combat with a big, mean dog. What else could it be really? If you were going to put a cat in Hell, we think that's pretty much what they'd have to do every day of his damned existence.

02



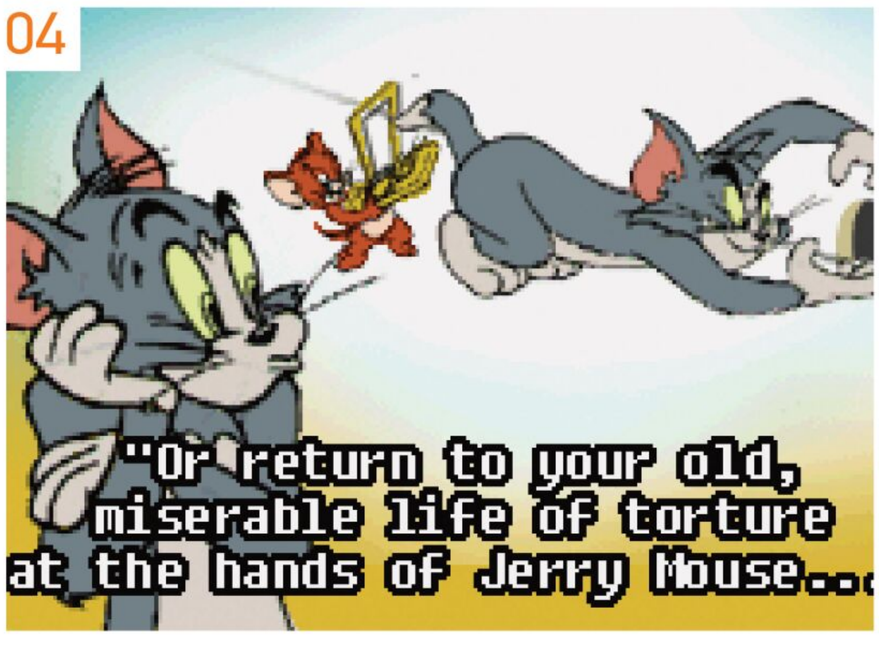

» But heck, a big smooch from Toodles is a pretty good reward for Tom – most of the time, the only thing touching his cheeks is a damaging object placed in his way by Jerry. By comparison, this might be paradise.

03



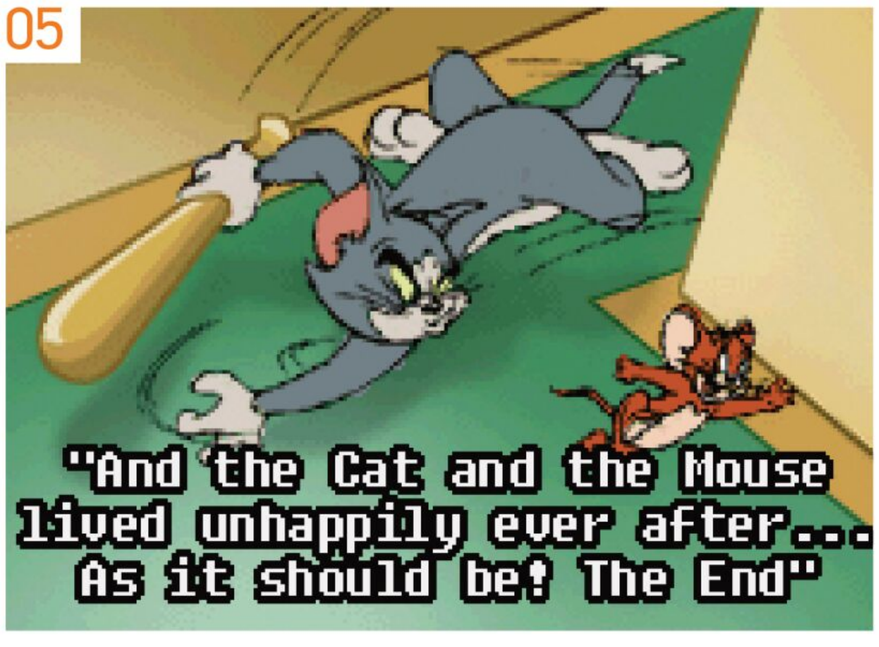

» Hold on though, there's some more! Toodles offers Tom a deal. On one hand, he could stay with her in paradise, eternally. All the fish he could want, possibly more kisses with Toodles, and probably a nice big fluffy cloud.

04




» On the other hand, he could return to the land of the living. You know what that means? Seemingly endless torment at the hands of a mouse named Jerry. He can relive every time he was outwitted, every time a saucepan got dropped on him and every futile attempted capture.

05




» In the end, there's no real choice. Tom and Jerry are like Batman and The Joker, Stone Cold Steve Austin and Vince McMahon, Captain Kirk and Darth Vader – enemies destined to be locked in eternal conflict. Tom returns to his old life, and his old enemy. He couldn't be happier.

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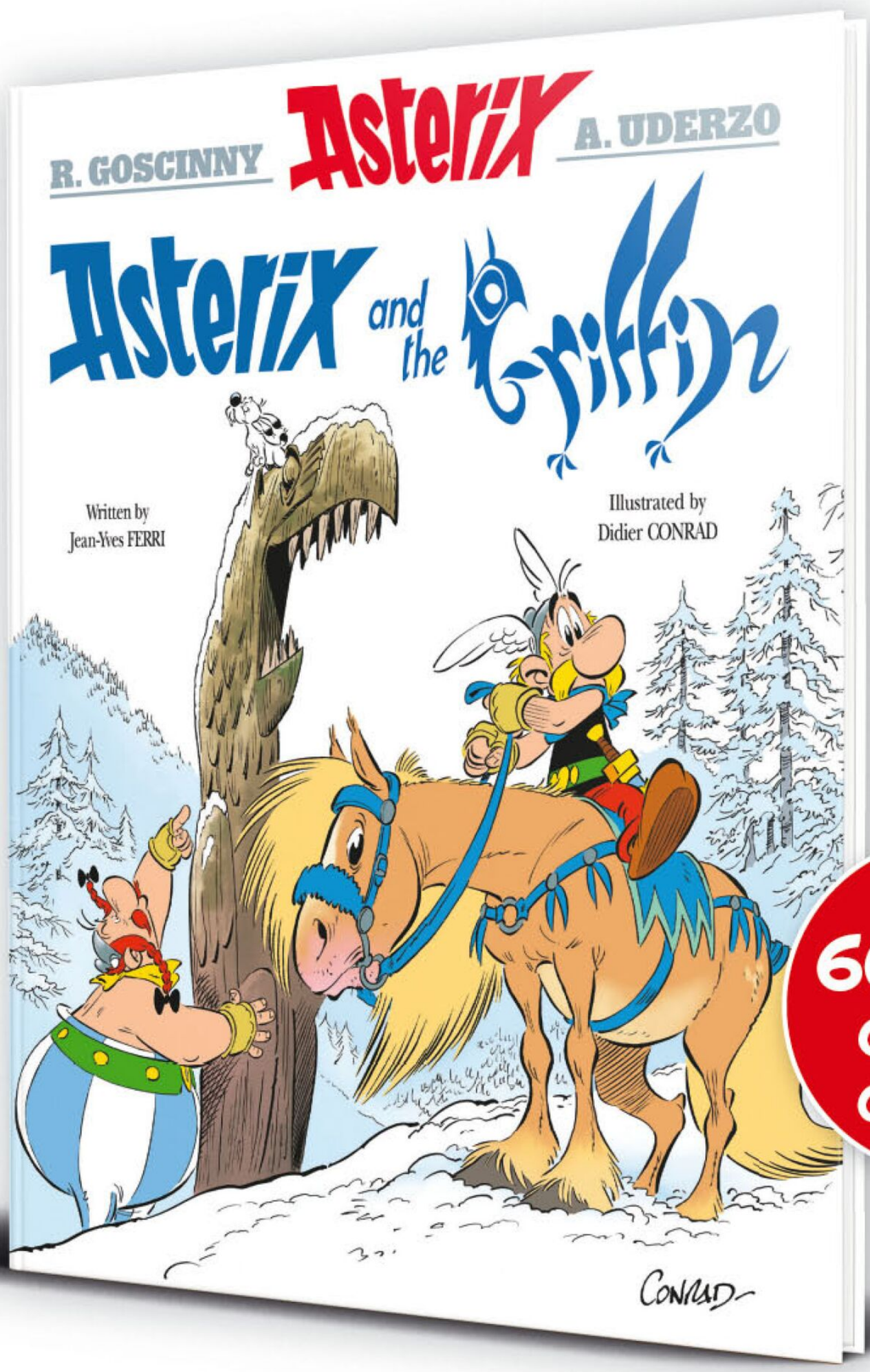


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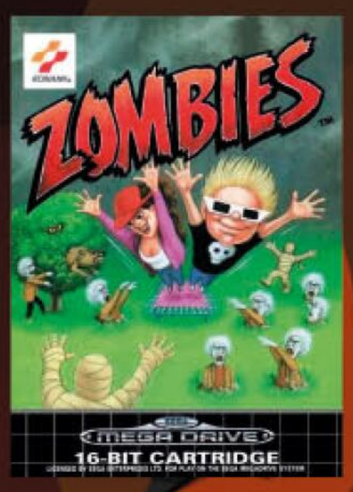


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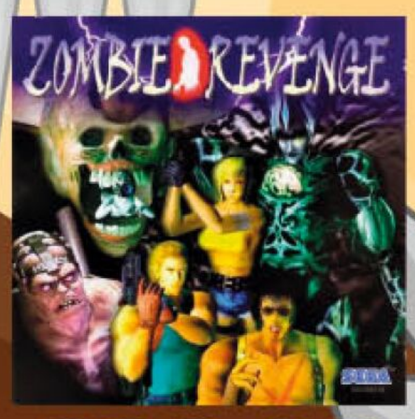


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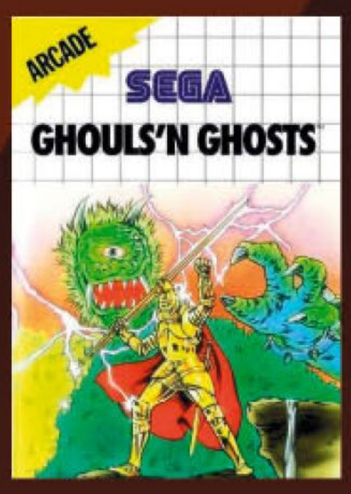


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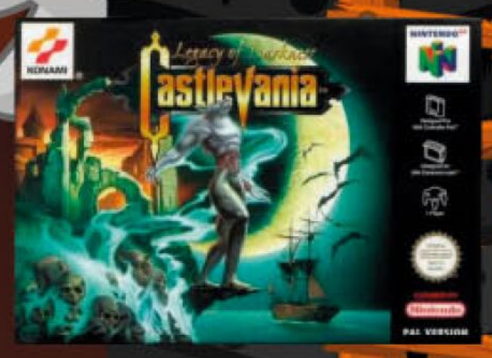


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